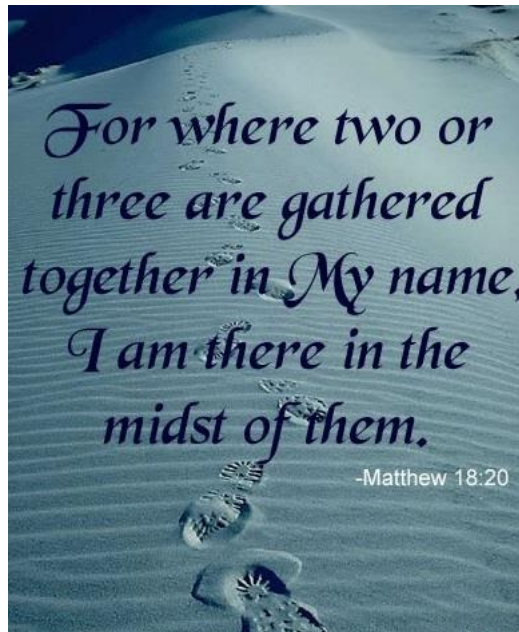


Small Group Leader's Training Manual



If the core of Jesus' work on earth was with and through a small group, then small groups must be important.

Table of Contents

Introduction to Small Groups	4
Two sides of the shepherding coin (caring and calling)	9
Facilitating living stones not watching stones	24
Book of Hebrews Small Groups	31
From Orphans to Family: Expressing the Welcome of God	35
Small Groups and Mission	42
Helping God's people connect with Him among them	47

Preface

- **Acts 2:46-47** *Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, (47) praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

God is a Divine Family. The Trinity was a Family before man was ever created. When They created man in "Our own image and Our own likeness" (Gen 1:26-28), that image contained the design for family relationships.

- **Ephesians 3:14-15** *For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, (15) from whom every (KJV the whole) family in heaven and on earth derives its name (identity).*

The creation mandate seen in Genesis 1:26-28, and 2:7-15 ("be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, rule over and subdue it, take care of God's creation"), was about God creating and joining His family together in order to pursue His mission on the earth.

The Bible begins with God's family walking together in pursuit of His mission and ends with His family fulfilling that mission at the great family event "the marriage supper of the Lamb" (Rev 19:7-8). This idea of family on a mission is at the heart of God's design for His church.

Family is at the beginning, the end, and is woven throughout His plan. The story line of the whole Bible can be summed up as God demonstrating His nature and redeeming activity in and through His family. Small groups are a part of walking in those family relationships as we pursue His mission.

In small groups people love God together, talk and pray through life issues together, eat together, laugh together, and grow together as they engage in His mission. Small groups help facilitate living as God's family together on God's mission.

To truly be connected to the House of God, not just a building or Sunday morning meeting, it is important to participate in both corporate gatherings as well as smaller groups.

If Jesus needed to walk with a small group in order to engage in the mission of God, then so do we!

Introduction to Small Groups

Biblical precedent for ministry in the home (intimate settings)

Much of Jesus activity centered around the home (intimate settings).

- **Mark 1:29-35** After Jesus called Simon, Andrew, James, and John He entered Simon's home and ministered there. People came to the home. See also Mt 8:14, Lk 4:38
- **Matthew 9:9-12** After calling Matthew, Jesus went into his house for a meal with tax-gatherers and sinners. Notice the intimacy of the home with a meal.
- **Matthew 10:1-15** Jesus sending out the disciples with authority instructs them to enter people's houses. He speaks of getting personal with people entering their space. In Luke 9:4 He sends out the 70 instructing them to enter houses. In Luke 10:1-7 they were not to move from house to house.
- **Matthew 13:1-52** After teaching parables to the multitudes, Jesus took His disciples into a house to further explain the parables in a more intimate bible study. We see the same thing in Mark 7:17-23, 9:28, 10:10
- **Matthew 17:24-27** Jesus takes Peter into the home setting to explain the concept of paying taxes. Again we see intimate instruction in the home setting.
- **Matthew 26:1-13** Jesus is in the home of Simon the leper with His disciples when a lady anointed Him with costly perfume as He was reclining at the table. See also Mk 14:3
- **Mark 2:1-11** Jesus was in His home teaching a large crowd when the paralytic was let through the roof because of the large crowd.
- **Mark 7:24-30** Jesus goes into a house to be with disciples when He encountered the Syrophenician woman who insisted that Jesus help her. She said even the dogs under the table feed on the crumbs.
- **Mark 9:33-50** Jesus takes His disciples into a home and begins to teach them about His death.
- **Luke 7:36-39** Jesus is in Pharisees home reclining at the table when the immoral woman anointed and washed His feet with her tears and hair.
Luke 8:41-56 Jesus enters Jairus house and ministers healing his daughter.
- **Luke 10:38** Jesus in Mary and Martha's house. Mary is the one that enters into close fellowship with the Lord which sheds some light on priorities in home meetings.
- **Luke 14:1-24** Jesus in one of the leaders of the Pharisees home healing the man with dropsy. He goes on to teach the parable of the dinner guest.

Much of the activity of the early church centered around the home (intimate settings).

- **Acts 2:2** The disciples were gathered in a house when they were filled with the Spirit.

- **Acts 2:46** *The early church met daily from house to house and in the temple. There were initially 3000 people. It would have been hard to get all of them into one meeting place. There were probably many home gatherings in that city*
- **Acts 5:42** *After Peter and the apostles were released from jail they went to the temple and from house to house teaching and preaching about Jesus.*
- **Acts 8:3** *Saul as he was persecuting the church went from house to house to drag believers off. Some of these were probably having meetings at the time of their arrest.*
- **Acts 9:11-19** *God instructs Ananias to go find Paul in the house of Judas where he was praying.*
- **Acts 10:1-8** *Peter was staying at the house of Simon the tanner when He instructs Cornelius the centurion to dispatch men to Peter that he would come to them. Peter went to Caesarea into his house where the Gentiles heard the good news and were filled with the Spirit.*
- **Acts 16:40** *Paul enters the house of Syria where a group of the brethren were gathering and he and Silas encouraged them.*
- **Acts 18:1-10** *Paul went to Corinth and stayed with Priscilla and Aquila in their home. He left there and went to the house of Titius Justus whose house was next to the synagogue. He stayed in Corinth a year and six months.*
- **Acts 20:20** *Paul in his farewell to the Ephesian elders reminds them of how he use to meet with them publicly and from house to house teaching them. He was at Ephesus three years.*
- **Acts 21:8** *When Paul passed through Caesarea he entered the house of Philip the evangelist and stayed with them. Hospitality*
- **Acts 21:30** *While in Rome Paul was in rented quarters welcoming all who came to him preaching and teaching them. Hospitality*
- **Romans 16:5** *Paul instructs Romans to greet Prisca and Aquila and the church that meets in their house.*
- **Col 4:15** *Paul refers to the church that is in the house of Nympha.*
- **Philemon 2** *Paul refers to Apphia and Archippus and the church that meets in their house.*
- **2 John 10** *False teachers are no to be received into their houses (this could have reference to gatherings in their houses).*

House meetings in history.

History indicates that Christians didn't build church buildings until about A.D. 150-200, although there are recent archeological discoveries that there were designated structure in caves near Rome as early as the 60-80s

If you would have ask "where is the church?" in any city of the ancient world where Christianity had penetrated in the first century, you would have been directed to a group of worshipping people basically gathering in a home or other available facilities. The church is people.

In the early days of the great Wesleyan Revival in England two hundred years ago, John Wesley discovered the importance of the small group for his day. He instituted small cell groups, class meetings, for the conservation and development of converts. In response to a criticism of this

method he wrote..."Many now happily experienced that Christian fellowship which they had not so much as an idea before. They began to 'bear one another's burdens' and naturally to care for each other.' As intimate acquaintance with, so they had a more endeared affection for, each other." If you trace the history of revivals, you will find that many had their beginnings in what we call cottage prayer meetings, or cell groups.

Purposes of Small Group meetings

Quotes: John Havlik "The church is never a place; but always a people, never a fold but always a flock; never a sacred building but always a believing assembly. The church is you who pray, not where you pray. A structure of brick or marble can no more be a church than your clothes of serge or satin can be you. There is in this world nothing sacred but man, no sanctuary of man but the soul."

Howard Snyder "In many western cities, the last thing the church needs is more buildings! What it often does need, however, is to rediscover true Christian community and fellowship."

Mark 12:28-31 "What commandment is the foremost of all?" (29) Jesus answered,... (30) **AND YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH.'** (31) "The second is this, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

- **To encourage and help every person develop a relationship with God.**
- **To encourage and help in developing relationships with His people.**
- **They help facilitate common family life together in Christ and by the Spirit.** There is a great importance of relationships in the Kingdom with God and one another. Church is not a meeting but a way of life. It is people living out their relationships in Christ together on a daily basis.
- **Provide an environment for socializing and helping facilitate building relationships.** Home meetings are only a facilitator. Just because you attend them is no guarantee that you will go on and enter the relational life. We must avoid seeing them institutionally to the point that they are just another meeting we attend rather than a life we enter into. If we approach them correctly they will be a catalyst to build and enter into family relationships.
- **They help provide a setting where God's word is worked out in our lives.** Often the main word to the body (mostly through Sunday morning messages) is amplified in the more intimate setting of small groups. As we evaluate the word in light of our common everyday experience and how it is applied in those experiences the word gets worked into our lives. As we listen to other's experiences of God's word working in their life we gain greater perspective of how it is worked into our own life.
- **They help create a relaxed natural atmosphere that helps foster every member participating (every joint supplies Eph 4:16, Col 2:19).** They participate through encouragement and the exercise of spiritual gifts.
- **They help develop people in worship, prayer, Spiritual gifting, teaching, and leadership on a more intimate less intimidating level.**

- **They help facilitate pastoral care of the sheep.** They provided points of contact to see how people are doing so we can see how to care for them.
- **They can be helpful in administrating service in the church and serving one another**
- **They are helpful for participating in God's mission and working in the harvest (Mt 9-11, Lk 9-10).** Jesus set forth this pattern while on earth as He was joined with a small group as they engaged in God's mission. He instructed His disciples to do the same in the last supper dialogue, John 13-22. If Jesus needed a small group to engage in God's mission then we do to. Small groups can provide a less threatening atmosphere, whether we go to them in serving or they come around us, to engage unchurched people so they get a taste of Kingdom life.

6 important reasons for every member to participate in small groups.

1. They are the laboratory for practicing unselfish love (God's love) in a real way. In small group connections you learn to care about others and share in their experiences, both good and bad.

- **1 Corinthians 12:26** *And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it. As we connect in a regular way we have the opportunity to consider God and others and lay our lives down in real love as Jesus commanded.*
- **1 John 3:16** *We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.*
- **Philippians 2:3-5** *Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; (4) do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. (5) Have this attitude(mind) in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,*

2. Small Groups give us "workouts" that help us grow and mature. Most people know that exercise is good for their health, but doing it on a consistent basis is another matter. Just like a muscle never grows without exercise we will never mature spiritually without real spiritual exercise. Active participation in small group is like working out.

The NT uses the phrase "one another" 59 times in such commands and "pray for, encourage, build up, love, and serve each other." These are the spiritual exercises that call us out of selfishness and helps us grow. Few of them can be done in a weekly corporate meeting.

We never grow in isolation. The only thing that tends to happen in isolation is self deception. We can fool ourselves into thinking we are more mature than we really are when we have no one else to consider than ourselves. Real maturity shows up in relationships.

3. Small Groups help prove and confirm our identity as part of God's family. We have an amazing potential in our humanity to be "legends in our own mind." We can think certain things about ourselves which there is little proof of in reality. Jesus said that we will truly be known as His disciples if, and only if, we love one another.

- **John 13:34-35** *"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. (35) "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* The active process of walking in love helps confirm we are His disciples.

No one of us is Christ body on our own. As we walk together we participate in a real way as a part of Christ body and member of His family.

4. Small Groups are the best way to participate in God's mission to the world. Jesus first demonstrated this pattern as He walked on this earth in fulfilling His mission. He did so with a small group. If Jesus needed to walk with a small group in order to fulfill His mission then we probably do as well. When He sent the disciples, He did so two by two as fellow family members on mission (Mt 9-11, Lk 9-10).

5. Small Groups connections help keep us from backsliding. Any of us are capable of deception and sin. There is a pattern in the Bible that our interaction with others helps keep us on track.

- **Hebrews 3:12-13** *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (13) But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin (Heb 10:20-25).*
- **James 5:19** *My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back*

There is also the Biblical pattern of Godly leadership that helps us in the process of staying on track with God. God gives all of us leaders to help "shepherd" us. They watch out for our spiritual welfare and exercise the Biblical exhortations to guard, protect, defend, teach, and care for our spiritual lives. *Hebrews 13:17 Yield to those leading you, and be submissive, for they watch for your souls, as those who must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you.* (Acts 20:28-29; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

6. Small Groups help provide a place for you to serve and develop your gifts. The Biblical pattern for church is that "every joint supplies." *Ephesians 4:16 from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love (Col 2:18-19).* People draw strength from your perspective and experiences of life. You have unique gifts and abilities that play an important role in God's family. Participating in Home Groups helps give a place for you to serve with your gifts and talents to build up His body. *1 Corinthians 12:7 But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good....1Co 14:12 So also you, since you are zealous of spiritual gifts, seek to abound for the edification of the church.*

Two Sides of the Shepherding Coin: Calling, and Caring

We are not a church that has small groups but a Spiritual family of small groups. Importance of Mt 18:19-20

Our Identity of small groups is rooted in the Trinity (God's family)

The initial creation account shows us that God created mankind in "OUR image and OUR likeness" **Genesis 1:26-28** Then God said, "Let **US** make man in **OUR** image, after **OUR** likeness...(27) So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (28) And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

God's image is a relational family (Eph 3:14-15, Isa 9:6 etc.). In the Trinity there is a small group (even though They are the Godhead) walking in relational oneness as they carry out Their mission.

While on earth Jesus' primary base of operation and mission was with and through 12 people He had joined together as a small group in family relationships (Mk 3:14-34).

Jesus prayed His last prayer on earth asking 3 times that His church would walk in the same type of relational life the Godhead has (with Them and each other).

- **John 17:11-22...** Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are... (15) "I do not ask You to take them out of the world, but to keep them from the evil one....(18) "As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world...(20) "I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; (21) **that they may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me.** (22) "The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, **that they may be one, just as We are one;** (23) **I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.**

Paul expressed the same desire that Jesus prayed for (even for people he hadn't met)

- **Colossians 2:1-2 BBE** For it is my desire to give you news of the great fight I am making for you and for those at Laodicea, and for all who have not seen my face in the flesh; (2)

- So that their hearts may be comforted, and that being joined together in love, they may come to the full wealth of the certain knowledge of the secret of God, even Christ,*
- **Ephesians 2:20-22** *BBE Built on the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief keystone, (21) In whom all the building, rightly joined together, comes to be a holy house of God in the Lord; (22) In whom you, with the rest, are united together as a living-place of God in the Spirit.*
 - **Ephesians 4:1-6:8** *I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, (2) with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, (3) eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace... (5:21) **submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ...** Independence is the sin of satan.*

The whole story of the Bible is about God's redeeming activity through His people whom He had joined together as His family. The story is contained in the phrase, "God's family of Spirit filled disciples walking together (relationships) on God's mission." It begins in Gen 1:26-28 and ends in Revelation 19:1-10 with the conclusion of His mission at the great family event, the marriage supper of the Lamb. The Old Testament is about God's family (Adam/Eve, Noah, Abraham/Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, and his 12 sons who became 12 tribes that became a nation). The NT is a continuation of God's family in and through Jesus Christ (Mt 12:48-50, Mk 3:14-34, Mk 10:29-30, Eph 2:19-22, 3:14-21 etc.)

TWO SIDES OF A SHEPHERDING COIN (CARING AND CALLING)

Our identity as "God's family walking together (relationships) on God's mission" has the 4 post-resurrection commissions guiding us

- **Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. (19) Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, (20) **teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.** And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."*
- **Mark 16:15-16** *... "Go into all the world and **proclaim the gospel to the whole creation.** (16) Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*
- **Luke 24:45-47...** *(47) and that **repentance and forgiveness of sins should be proclaimed** in his name to all nations, beginning from Jerusalem.*
- **John 21:15-17** *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "**Feed my lambs.**" (16) He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "**Tend my sheep.**" (17) He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "**Feed my sheep.**"*

The 2 that are the most often neglected (The two sides of a shepherding coin)

- **Caring:** Shepherding and caring for His people (tending and feeding lambs and sheep (Jn 21:15-17)
- **Calling:** Making disciples and training people to put into practice everything Jesus commanded" (Mt 28:18-19)

Caring without calling to discipleship produces spiritual hospitals or consumer churches that people use rather than live in as a family on mission. Discipleship without caring produces the Pharisees house. A good leader cares personally at the same time that calls and challenges personally. When you challenge without caring its obnoxious aggression; when you care without challenging it's ruinous empathy. When you do neither it's insincere Christianity.

CALLING: Making Disciples Who Put His Word into Practice

Discipleship - The call to follow Him in order to be transformed (25 times in the Gospels Jesus calls to "follow Me" only 4 times "believe in Me"). Jesus' clear emphasis was on following Him (*Matthew 10:39, Mark 8:34-35, Luke 9:23-24, Luke 17:32-33, Matthew 16:24-25, Mar 10:21, Luk 14:33, 18:22 etc.*).

Helping people grow and progress as disciples usually includes 5 things.

1. Receiving God's word (teaching both conversationally as well other means) that applies to both belief and living. The aim of discipleship is putting His word into practice.

God's freedom and blessing comes to authentic disciples following Jesus and obeying His word:

- **Luke 11:27-28** *While Jesus was speaking, a woman in the crowd shouted, "How blessed is the mother who gave birth to you and the breasts that nursed you." (28) Jesus replied, "Rather, how blessed are those who hear and obey God's word."*
- **John 8:31-36** *So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine; (32) and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."... 36 "So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.*
- **Matthew 28:19-20** *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*
- **Romans 1:5** *through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith among all the Gentiles for His name's sake,*
- **Hard to separate belief and obedience John 3:36** *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.*

Discipleship isn't information based but relationally following and obeying Jesus.

- **James 1:21-25** *Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. (22) But prove yourselves **doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.** (23) For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; (24) for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. (25) But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does.*
- **John 13:17** *"If you know these things, you are **blessed if you do them.**"*

Any time the word is shared we need to think of steps to put it into practice. This is what Mt 28 is about, not just information but obedience-based discipleship.

3 John 1:4 I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth.

Three important things to consider when sharing any portion of God's word

- **What do you want people to know?**
- **What do you want them to do in light of the knowledge?**
- **How can you both help them hear from Jesus and practically suggest steps to walk in the word?**

Remember that we are always seeking to put it into practice His word that comes up in our small group gatherings through the gifts of the Spirit, worship, fellowship, testimonies, or looking at the Bible. Here are questions we should always be considering in small group gatherings regarding His word.

- **What is Jesus speaking to you with this knowledge and how will you respond?**
- **What is a practical step that you can take to put this word into practice?**
- **What are you planning on doing with this knowledge?** Articulate at least one step of obedience you will put into practice this week.
- **How will the hearing of this truth affect your life?** This interrupts the consumers mindset that we have in the church world.
- **How will what we heard affect us in loving God as well as loving and serving others (the 2 great commandments of Jesus)?** The endpoint of discipleship is our lives reoriented around loving God and loving/serving others.
- **What are some of the challenges to put Jesus' word into practice so we can encourage and pray for you?**

2. Personally encountering Jesus through private Spiritual disciplines (prayer, worship, and Word).

3. Engaging in personal ministry (serving and mission).

4. Encountering and walking in Godly relationships that put into practice the 59 one another's.

- **Heb 10:24-25** NASB *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, 25 not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*
- **Heb 3:12-14** NASB *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end,*

5. Walking through Defining Moments that shape our faith.

Defining moments involve pain and disappointment, the death of a friend, family member, divorce, prolonged illness, job transfer, or betrayal of a friend. Adverse circumstances can **damage** an individual's faith or **deepen** it.

CARING: Walking with and taking care of God's people.

Moses and Jethro's advice - Multiple shepherds caring for God's people as they walk together on His mission.

- **Exodus 18:13-22** *It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening. (14) Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, "What is this thing that you are doing for the people? Why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?" (15) Moses said to his father-in-law, "Because the people come to me to inquire of God. (16) "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." (17) Moses' father-in-law said to him, "The thing that you are doing is not good. (18) "**You will surely wear out, both yourself and these people who are with you, for the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone.** (19) "Now listen to me: I will give you counsel, and God be with you. You be the people's representative before God, and you bring the disputes to God, (20) then teach them the statutes and the laws, and make known to them the way in which they are to walk and the work they are to do. (21) "**Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens.** (22) "Let them judge the people at all times; and let it be that every major dispute they will bring to you, but every minor dispute they themselves will judge. So it will be easier for you, and they will bear the burden with you.*
- **Jesus' heart in working with people in harvest** *Matthew 9:36-38* Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without

a shepherd. (37) Then He *said to His disciples, "**The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few.** (38) "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."

- **Jer 3:14-15** NASB...And I will bring you to Zion.' 15 "Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding.
- **Eze 36:10-38** 'I will multiply men on you, all the house of Israel, all of it; and the cities will be inhabited and the waste places will be rebuilt. (11) 'I will multiply on you man and beast; and they will increase and be fruitful; and I will cause you to be inhabited as you were formerly and will treat you better than at the first... (22) "Therefore say to the house of Israel, 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "It is not for your sake, O house of Israel, that I am about to act, but for My holy name, which you have profaned among the nations where you went. ...(26) "Moreover, I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. (27) "I will put My Spirit within you and cause you to walk in My statutes, and you will be careful to observe My ordinances... (33) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "On the day that I cleanse you from all your iniquities, I will cause the cities to be inhabited, and the waste places will be rebuilt... (36) "Then the nations that are left round about you will know that I, the LORD, have rebuilt the ruined places and planted that which was desolate; I, the LORD, have spoken and will do it." (37) 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "This also I will let the house of Israel ask Me to do for them: I will increase their men like a flock. (38) "Like the flock for sacrifices, like the flock at Jerusalem during her appointed feasts, so will the waste cities be filled with flocks of men. Then they will know that I am the LORD.'"
- **Joh 3:16** NASB "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.
- **1 Peter 5:1-7** Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, (2) shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; (3) nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. (4) And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. (5) You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for **GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.** (6) **Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, (7) casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you.**

The word "care" means "to be of interest to, to concern, or to care for." The fact that God is interested in and cares for us is one of the powerful aspects of God's nature that drew us to Christ. He knows us. He cares for us. He is concerned about us. This is an amazing revelation of

the heart of God! This is what broke through our darkness. The fact that He cared for us caused us to run to Him not continue to run away from Him.

- **Hebrews 4:14-16** *Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. (15) For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

The aspect of expressing the caring heart of God was key to Jesus' impact.

Jesus expressed God's care even when talking about holiness and a fear of Him.

- **Luke 12:1-7** *Under these circumstances, after so many thousands of people had gathered together that they were stepping on one another, He began saying... (4) "I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that have no more that they can do. (5) "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell; yes, I tell you, fear Him! (6) "Are not five sparrows sold for two cents? Yet not one of them is forgotten before God. (7) "Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear; you are more valuable than many sparrows..." 22-29 NASB And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on...(24) "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; they have no storeroom nor barn, **and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds!...**(28) "But if God so clothes the grass in the field, **how much more will He clothe you?** You men of little faith!*

4 Important thoughts to express in caring for the hurting

All of you have the responsibility in one way or another to make disciples, mentor, and give care to God's people. When Jesus saw people and the distressed condition they were in it prompted Him to show us the need for shepherding (caring for people) in the process of harvest.

We know that in our everyday life, our corporate gatherings, as well as in the people we are responsible to care for, there are hurting people who are in desperate need for care and hope. Even the people that appear to be the strongest are at times just barely hanging on!

Because of this we need to constantly help remind ourselves and others three important things about the character of God. God's goodness and compassion is the true north of our spiritual and emotional compass. He is who leads us out of any dark path. We need to make sure in the midst of the hurt and confusion these three things about God are in the forefront of our thinking.

1. God knows our situation.

God knows the good and the bad. Nothing surprises Him. He is aware of our pain.

- **Psalms 56:8** *You have taken account of my wanderings; Put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?*
- **Psalms 56:8** *Msg You've kept track of my every toss and turn through the sleepless nights, Each tear entered in your ledger, each ache written in your book.*
- **Hebrews 4:15-16** *For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. (16) Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.*

2. God cares about our situation.

- **Psalms 103:13-14** *Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him. (14) For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust.*
- **Psalms 103:13-14** *Msg As parents feel for their children, GOD feels for those who fear him. (14) He knows us inside and out, keeps in mind that we're made of mud.*
- He knows we are not able to handle things completely on our own and He cares about us. This is a constant about Him. One of the lies that come to our mind when we hurt is that God doesn't see or care. We need to come back to the truth that He always cares.

3. God's perspective of seasons and His hope in the midst of them

Life is lived in seasons. Some will be difficult. God makes everything beautiful in its seasons.

- **Ecclesiastes 3:1-11** *To everything there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heavens: (2) a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pull up what is planted; (3) a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; (4) a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; (5) a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; (6) a time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; (7) a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; (8) a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace. (9) What profit does he have who works in that in which he labors? (10) I have seen the task which God has given to the sons of men to be humbled by it. (11) He has made everything beautiful in His time; also He has set eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end.*
- **Acts 2:21, Joel 2:21, Isaiah 2:2, Micha 4:1, And it shall come to pass**
- **John 16:33** *"These things I have spoken to you, so that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world."*

Help people know it's okay not to be okay. We don't try to fake it till we make it. We don't try to rush people through the season.

- **1 Peter 4:12-13** *Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you; (13) but to the degree that you share the sufferings of Christ, keep on rejoicing, so that also at the revelation of His glory you may rejoice with exultation.*

Realize you need God and each other. Moses needed Aaron and Hur to hold up his arms. You may now know what to say but the gift of your presence will speak to people.

- **Psalms 142:2-4** *I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare my trouble before Him. (3) When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, You knew my path. In the way where I walk They have hidden a trap for me. (4) Look to the right and see; **For there is no one who regards me; There is no escape for me; No one cares for my soul.***

Remind people of God's hope that He will cause good things in the midst of the difficult. You get stronger through resistance training. There are things you have to overcome to become the person God calls you to be.

- **Romans 8:28** *And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.*
- **Acts 2:25-27** *"For David says ... (Msg) I've pitched my tent in the land of hope.; (27) BECAUSE YOU WILL NOT ABANDON MY SOUL TO HADES, NOR ALLOW YOUR HOLY ONE TO UNDERGO DECAY.*

4. God can change us and our situation.

Sometimes God changes us, other times He changes the circumstances, and many times He changes both. He will move to change. In hurting times we need to reawaken to the fact that God has great power and ability to bring change. We need to encourage ourselves and others of the truth about God's power, ability, and willingness to move and change things so we can move from confusion to hope.

- **Ephesians 1:18-20** *I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know ...(19) and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might (20) which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places.*
- **Ephesians 3:20-21** *Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, (21) to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.*

Caring for and Calling God's people in different situations

God's house is a home for the weak and lonely

Spiritual sparrows and swallows.

- **Pro 26:2** *Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying, So a curse without cause does not alight.*
- **Psa 84:1-12.** *How lovely are Your dwelling places, O LORD of hosts! (2) My soul longed and even yearned for the courts of the LORD; My heart and my flesh sing for joy to the living God. (3) The bird (sparrow) also has found a house, And the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, Even Your altars, O LORD of hosts, My King and my God. (4) How blessed are those who dwell in Your house! They are ever praising You. Selah. (5) How blessed is the man whose strength is in You, In whose heart are the highways to Zion!...(10) For a day in Your courts is better than a thousand outside. I would rather stand at the threshold of the house of my God Than dwell in the tents of wickedness. (11) For the LORD God is a sun and shield.*

In Biblical times a sparrow speaks of that which is of little worth and the swallow speaks of restlessness. Both types of birds were considered of little value. There are people in the world and the church that are "spiritual sparrows and swallows." How we try to help shepherd/care for them is important to their finding the life God has for them.

The spiritual sparrow has little worth. They have no real sense of dignity or destiny. The spiritual swallow speaks of people who have no rest or protection. *Psa 102:7 I watch, and am as a sparrow alone on the house top.* The Hebrew word for *sparrow* simply means "a very small bird." The sparrow, the kind in the Word of God, is a lonely bird. You never see the sparrow in groups; you see him alone. Both the sparrow and swallow need to find dignity, destiny, rest, protection, and a home, the House of God.

- **Psa 68:5-6** *A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows, Is God in His holy habitation. (6) God makes a home for the lonely; He leads out the prisoners into prosperity, Only the rebellious dwell in a parched land.*

Sparrows were considered a cheap sacrifice that poor people could afford. Think if you were a sparrow. You would understand that your life was not worth very much. When Jesus came on the scene it meant a new hope for spiritual sparrows and swallows. He brought a whole different revelation of God in contrast to the religion of that day. The religious leaders (Scribes, Pharisees, etc.) emitted an attitude that reinforced the fact that certain people weren't very valuable to God. They were quick to point out God's standards and people's inability to keep them. At the same time they were very poor at bending down to help people. *Luke 11:46 He said, "Yes, and I can be even more explicit. You're hopeless, you religion scholars! You load people down with rules and regulations, nearly breaking their backs, but never lift even a finger to help.*

A church without broken and messed up people around it is a church that is broken and messed up according to God's design. The church cannot afford to be separated from those separated from Christ.

God's House reflects the attitude of Jesus.

Jesus, in contrast to the religion of His day, offered a perspective in which spiritual sparrows and swallows were valuable to God. God saw their lives and was mindful of their situations.

- **Mat 10:29-31** *"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. (30) "But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. (31) "So do not fear; **you are more valuable than many sparrows.***

This made a great impact on spiritual sparrows and swallows. The care of God came through Jesus' life. It brought a sense of care and dignity to the lives of people who had none. This enabled Him to say challenging difficult things to people, but somehow, because of His care, they knew He was for them and they were valuable.

When the house of God has a proper heart for sparrows and swallows we will see examples of people finding strength and stability in their life. It is what many people in the church at Corinth found. *1Co 1:26-27 For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, **not many mighty, not many noble;** (27) but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and **God has chosen the weak things of the world** to shame the things which are strong,*

Helping people (caring for and calling) in 3 different situations and states.

God's instruction shows us different ways of approaching people according to their situation and state. We see this variety of approaches in the instruction for caring for people in 1 Thessalonians 5:11-15. There are three specific scenarios listed.

- **1 Thessalonians 5:11-15** *Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing. ...(14) We urge you, brethren, **admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.** (15) See that no one repays another with evil for evil, but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.*

1. Admonish the unruly: The Greek word of "admonish (noutheteo)" means "to warn, caution, to urge to duty, or to remind of obligation." The word for the "unruly (Ataktos)" means "the disorderly, out of rank, or deviation from the prescribed order."

The word *ataktos* often was used in a military sense. When used in a military sense it had the idea of a soldier who was out of line, a soldier who was out of rank, a soldier who was guilty of disorderly conduct, who was insubordinate, non-submissive, disobeying orders, or not following through on his duty. He was out of step. It eventually came to mean anybody who doesn't do his duty, or anybody who doesn't follow through on his responsibility. Moffit translates it "loafers". Some have suggested it as the quitters, idle, lazy, indolent, or apathetic. But it doesn't have to mean just that. It can mean someone who doesn't do his duty, not only out of apathy, but someone who doesn't do his duty out of a rebellion.

In a current sense, it refers to the wayward. They're out of line. They're out of step. Everybody else is going in one direction, they're not. Everybody else understands spiritual duty, and is willing to do it. People will do whatever God has gifted them to do. They tend to be behind the leadership of the church, supporting the direction they are going. They are on board, on the team, participating, and involved. These are the kind of people that make the church move and grow.

The unruly reject all that. They're out of step. It may be that they're not doing their duty because they don't care; it may be that they're not doing their duty because they're angry, rebellious, or contentious. They're just not supportive. They're not a part of what's going on. Sometimes they hang on the fringe for a while and finally they are so bitter that they just leave and go somewhere else. They tend to be the complaining bench warmers.

How are we to deal with the unruly? Paul says to admonish them. There's no formula, there's no program, and there's no system. Individual sheep go to these sheep that are hanging on the fringes and not doing their duty and warn them. They come alongside and as A.T. Robertson said, "noutheteo means to put sense into." Sheep come alongside and put some sense into their heads. One writer says, "It is the idea of coming to someone who is following a path that ultimately ends in serious consequences and instructing them about the inevitability of those consequences."

It doesn't have the idea of distant judgmentalism. It doesn't have the idea of criticism from a vantage point of superiority. It simply has the sense of coming along closely and intimately in order to show someone the consequences of their conduct and attitude. It is born out of a heart that doesn't want them to continue in that direction and experience those consequences.

2. Encourage the fainthearted: The Greek word for "encourage (*paramutheomia*)" means "to calm, console, encourage, or inspire with courage." The Greek word for "fainthearted (*oligopsuchos*)" means "feeble-minded, lacking courage, or to be timid or full of fear." The idea is to be "small souled." The small souled person tends to fear the unknown. They worry about everything. As William Hardy said, "They see the manure pile in every meadow." They lack courage and love what seems safe. They only want to walk in a path that somebody has paved. They want a risk-free life with absolute security. They're usually melancholy. They are afraid of opposition, usually sad and/or worried all the time. They often are depressed, in despair, and discouraged. They can't seem to rise above their problems

To encourage means to come close to their side and speak to them. Out of a relationship with them we comfort, strengthen, and reassure them. It carries the idea that someone stronger has personal, intimate fellowship with them that provides encouragement to go forward.

3. Help the weak: The Greek word for “help (antechomia)” means “to hold, to support, and to be alongside (like an ankle splint).” The Greek word for “weak” means “feeble, liable to yield, break, or collapse.” A weak person is very susceptible to temptation and sin. It's almost a hypersensitivity to sin. Because of this they are also very susceptible to the condemnation of the enemy.

Paul uses this word, and it most often refers to people who are very susceptible to sin. These are the weak people that you seem to barely pick up out of the hole of sin and get them dusted off and they're back in it again. These are the people that find it so terribly difficult to do God's will. They keep falling into the same sins over and over and you can seem to work so very hard and there they go again. The spiritual sparrows and swallows usually fall into the category of the weak. .

The Greek word for “help” means “to hold firmly to, to hold tightly to, to cling to, to support, or to hold them up.” It carries the same idea of “bearing one another’s burdens.” We come alongside and walk with them providing an external support that they don’t have on the inside. This is an important way in which we help spiritual sparrows and swallows find rest and dignity in the house of God. It is sheep taking care of and supporting weaker sheep.

With all patience: Patience is always the important issue in dealing with sparrows and swallows. Patience has to do with not giving up. Patience is the foundational mentality in dealing with all God’s people. The word carries with it the idea that we are patient with people who will try our patience. It is being patient with people who will tend to frustrate us. It is being patient with people who will disappoint us. It is being patient with people who will sometimes break our heart.

Biblical instruction on patience.

The Bible says a lot about the importance of being patient with His people. There is a gentle patience that we exercise toward God’s people (especially sparrows and swallows) out of which God’s strength and stability comes.

- **Ephesians 4:1-3** NASB walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, **2 with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,** *3 being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.*
- **Ephesians 4:23-32** NASB *and that you be renewed in the spirit of your mind,...(32) Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.*

- **Philippians 4:4-5** NASB Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! (5) Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near.
- **Colossians 3:12-13** NASB (12) So, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; (13) bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you.
- **Titus 3:2-4** NASB to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. (3) For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another.
- **2 Timothy 2:24-26** NASB The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.
- **2 Timothy 4:2** NASB preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.
- **2 Timothy 3:10-11** NASB Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, me!
- **1Pe 3:4** but let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit.
- **Jam 3:17** But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy.
- **1 Thessalonians 5:13-15** NASB Live in peace with one another. 14 We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone.
- **James 5:19-20** MSG My dear friends, if you know people who have wandered off from God's truth, don't write them off. Go after them. Get them back 20 and you will have rescued precious lives from destruction and prevented an epidemic of wandering away from God.
- **2 Peter 1:5-7** NASB Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, (6) and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, (7) and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love.
- **Jud 1:22** And have mercy on some, who are doubting;

Patience is essential to sparrows and swallows finding strength. You may ask, "How patient do we need to be?" The answer is, more patient than you've been. We are to be as patient as God has been with us. Some may mistakenly think patience means non-involvement. That is not the case. Patience is not passive. Here are some contrasts between patience and passivity:

- Patience is something you exercise; passivity is failing to exercise
- Patience is expectation; passivity is procrastination
- Patience is powerful; passivity is purposeless
- Patience is vigilant; passivity is slothful
- Patience is hopeful; passivity is hopeless

- Patience is faithful; passivity is faithless
- Patience is aware; passivity is clueless
- Patience is obedient; passivity is rebellious
- Patience is a virtue; passivity is sinful

A great example of the difference between patience and passivity is going to a busy doctor's office. You go and sit in a busy waiting room in which there are sick children screaming and crying. We exercise patience to endure the waiting room because we have symptoms that need addressed. Passivity sees the same scenario and would decide to ignore the symptoms because of the hassle involved in dealing with them. In dealing with sparrows and swallows patience causes people to "ignore the hassles" and wade out into their lives to help bring the stability, dignity, and the hope of God to their lives.

Calling, Caring, and Consistent Reminding

The Holy Spirit spoke a word in my heart one time while I was leading a study time with a group of students. It is not what you say to them that they will remember, but it is what you continually say to them that they will remember."

As I started meditating on this thought I began to think on relevant issues from the Word. For example, Bible scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount was not just a one-time teaching but was a compilation on of Jesus' teachings that He taught over and over. It wasn't just what He said on one occasion, but it was what He continued to say. Throughout the Bible it says a lot about remembering. Paul and Peter both write in the Epistles about reminding. The word "remind" means *to cause one to remember, bring to remembrance, recall to mind: to another, to put one in remembrance, admonish, of something to be reminded, to remember*. Consider the following Scriptures.

- **Romans 15:15** *But I have written very boldly to you on some points, so as to remind you again, because of the grace that was given me from God.*
- **1 Cor 4:17** *For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.*
- **2 Timothy 1:6** *For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.*
- **2 Timothy 2:14** *Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless, and leads to the ruin of the hearers.*
- **Titus 3:1** *Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed,*
- **2 Peter 1:12** *Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed.*

Any involved in caring for God's people understand that they must patiently impart over and over the same important truths. Sheep can tend for forget. Vision is caught and maintained as

we call it to mind with people over and over. Why do we need to constantly remind? All the enemies of our soul (flesh, devil, and the world's system) war against the Spirit inside of us and press us to forget the truths of God. In pressure and difficulty there is also a tendency to forget God's truth. This is why the Bible speaks of keeping the Word of God within and before us.

- **Jude 1:3** *Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

The letter of Jude was written as a cyclical letter to the churches connected to the church in Jerusalem approximately 35 years after the day of Pentecost. Jude, who was the leader of the Jerusalem church, wanted to write to the other churches about certain things but then realized by the Spirit that he needed to remind them to contend for the faith that they had received. They had let things slip and needed to be reminded.

There is a danger in Christian leadership always trying to have some "new revelation" to bring forth all the time. Unfortunately, leaders who follow this path can do this because of a subconscious desire to keep people interested and impressed. It can easily slip into tickling ears.

- **2 Timothy 4:3** *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires.*

Good shepherds remember that sheep tend to get what you continue to say more than what you say one time. Consistent reminding is more about calling people to do the Word, not just hear the word. Doing the Word is where the blessing is, not just hearing. Leaders and care-givers should never grow weary of reminding.

SMALL GROUPS THAT FACILITATE LIVING STONES NOT WATCHING STONES

Biblical Context

We are not leading Bible studies in which we have lessons but shepherding small groups where everyone participates in God's life together pursuing His mission.

- **Rom 12:4-9** *For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, (5) so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. (6) Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, **each of us is to exercise** them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; (7) if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; (8) or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness. (9) Let love be without hypocrisy. Abhor what is evil; cling to what is good.*
- **1Co 12:7-12** *But to **each one** is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. (8) For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; (9) to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, (10) and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. (11) But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. (12) For even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ.*
- **1 Corinthians 14:26** *What is the outcome then, brethren? **When you assemble, each one** has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification.*
- **Ephesians 4:12-16** *for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ..(15) but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, (16) from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together **by what every joint supplies**, according to **the proper working of each individual part**, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.*
- **Ephesians 5:18-20** *And do not get drunk with wine, for that is dissipation, but be filled with the Spirit, (19) speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord; (20) always giving thanks for all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God, even the Father;*

- **Colossians 2:1-19** *For I want you to know how great a struggle I have on your behalf and for those who are at Laodicea, and for all those who have not personally seen my face, (2) that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself... (19) and not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, **being supplied** and held together **by the joints and ligaments**, grows with a growth which is from God.*
- **1 Peter 4:10-11** *As each one has received a special gift, **employ it** in serving one another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. (11) Whoever speaks, is to do so as one who is speaking the utterances of God; whoever serves is to do so as one who is serving by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.*
- **Hebrews 3:12-13** *Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (13) But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*
- **Hebrews 10:24-25** *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, (25) not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

Small group and corporate meetings should not be like going to the theater but more like going to the gym.

For way too long American Christians have mistakenly believed that sitting passively in the seats of church buildings getting fed is all that is required. The main goal for finding and attending a church is to "find one you like" with the goal to sit and get. If you like the presentation of the corporate meeting or the programs, then you become "involved" by attending and receiving.

Church isn't a gathering of watching stones but "living stones" (1 Pet 2:4-5). We are never called to accommodate consumer Christianity in which we simply come week after week to sit and get. God's design is for "every joint to supply." This is where growth, maturity, and Kingdom expansion comes in and through the church. Christianity is not a spectator sport. Going to small groups isn't to be like going to the theatre, but more like going to the gym where we participate in what makes us and others stronger.

REAL CONNECTION WITH GOD AND EACH OTHER

We are helping people connect on three interconnected levels.

- **Real Connection with God**
- **Real Connection with One Another**
- **Engagement in His everyday mission to the earth**

Our gatherings should encourage body ministry in which everyone participates in connecting with God and each other. In every meeting there will be people there who have supply and

need supply. People who have Spiritual insight and people who need Spiritual insight. The wise leader draws out both.

- **Isaiah 50:4** *The Lord GOD has given Me **the tongue of disciples**, That I may know how to sustain the weary one with a word. He awakens Me morning by morning, He awakens My ear to listen as a disciple.*

Real Connection with God

- **2Co 6:16**...*For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "**I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**"*
- **Exo 29:46**...*I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, **that I might dwell among them**...*(see Exo 25:8, Lev 26:12, Num 5:3, 16:3, Deut 6:15, 7:21, 23:14, 15, 32:51, Ps 22:3, 46:4, 1Pe 2:9-11, Ex 19:5, Dt 4:20, 7:6, 14:2, Ps 135:4, Mal 3:17, Tit 2:14, Eph 2:19-22, 1 Tim 3:15).
- **Matthew 18:19-20**...(20) *For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."*

Leaders need to always be aware of His design and do everything they can to see people connect with Him as He is "among them." Small group meetings are uniquely challenging for leaders in helping people connect with Jesus among them. In larger gatherings there are certain expectations and aids to help people connect (worship teams, prayer times etc.), that are not at smaller gatherings.

Two erroneous extremes in connecting with God among us

- **We only have real connection with Him when His people are experientially "undone" by Him.** At the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chron 25:13-14), or John on Patmos (Rev 1:12-18), people couldn't stand or speak in His presence.
- **An assumed rather than a real connection.** In this posture there is no tangible attempt to help people connect with Him. He is just silently there, and people invisibly connect with Him in their heart without connecting in reality. It is like some Jewish Passover meals in which they have an empty cup and chair for Elijah to come at some point to join them, yet the chair and cup are always empty.

Small group gatherings often face the second extreme more than the first. In some gatherings you would hardly know Jesus was there. The leaders talk "about Him" or it is fellowship focused with each other and you would hardly know He is there. It is much like Jesus standing outside of the gathering of the lukewarm church at Laodicea trying to get them to open the door so He can come in an "dine with them" (Rev 3:20).

Even "prayer request time" becomes me focused rather than connecting with Him focused. I often wonder what someone from another planted who was sent to investigate what the Christian small group gatherings were about would report after attending. one. *"They believe their God is mysteriously around them but mostly He is invisible and silent. They don't give Him much attention. There is an expectation that He will move when they ask Him to in order to make their life free of hardships and go the way they want. I conclude that the Christians God and small group gatherings is about silently standing by His people in order to help them have lives free of trouble or challenge."*

Tips in helping people connect with God during gatherings

Spiritual initiative is important. Jesus did it. He asked people to take steps first.

Realize afresh that this is God's design. He is not wanting to be a silent guest. We do everything we can to call attention to Him. We don't want to be like Martha who was busy doing things for Jesus but ignoring Him as He was right there in her house (Lk 10:38-41).

- **Col 1:18** *He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.*
- **Don't yield to condemnation that you can't rally lead people to connect with Him, or that He won't reveal Himself.** You may not be a worship leader, Bible Scholar, or prophet but you can call people to connect with Him. We are not trying to reproduce certain types of corporate gatherings we are simply connecting with Him and each other.
- **Help people overcome the common fear of speaking, singing, or praying in front of other people.** Little well placed comments can help ease this fear and prime the pump to connect with Him. "I want a few of you to pray out and remember there are no perfect prayers. God just want us to use honest speech and we are all in the same boat of being nervous about singing or praying in front of others. Lest encourage each other as they pray out okay?" Or something like, "we are going to worship and there is no music. Don't worry how you sound because God said make a joyful noise. God loves us to sing to Him (quote a couple of the passages that refer to this). Do everything you can to help people be at ease to step out to pray, sing, or prophesy.
- **Encourage people give feedback as others lead out in prayer.** Jesus speaks of the "prayer of agreement." Most people would be nervous if they were speaking to someone who gave them not indication or response about how they were receiving what was being said. Tell the group if they agree to give feedback (saying yes, amen, or some other indication of agreement). We are not just listening to others pray we are praying with them.
- **Help people overcome any condemnation about their own lack of consistent personal prayer or worship life.** At any moment none of us are worthy based on our performance to pray in front of others and condemnation will try to hinder people from praying out. Bring up something like, we are going to pray and you may not have had a

good day or week in your personal walk but Jesus. Remember He stands like the Father looking for the prodigal son/daughter to come home and will run to meet you and cover your shame. Go ahead and move towards Him, He will receive us. The bigger problem is to stay away from Him when He wants us to come to Him.

- **Listen for the Spirit for things the people may be struggling with and address them with Spiritual insight.**
- **Remind people regularly of the Biblical ways of entering into His presence.**
Psa 100:2-4 Come before Him with joyful singing...4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.
Col 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.
- **Encourage people to connect honestly from the heart.** We don't want to have empty religion as Jesus said, Mar 7:6-7...it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME. The Biblical idea of "heart" means our "inward vitality or focus."
- **Remember that connecting with Him is job #1.** You may have revelation of what you would like to speak about or help people see during the gathering, but it will be fruitless apart from Him ("apart from Me you can do nothing" Jn 15:5).
- **Have confidence that you can lead people to connect with Him.** Leaders often fear that if they step out people will sit and watch instead of participating. Don't give into that fear a call people to participate even if there are awkward pauses.
- **Calling for outward Biblical postures can help overcome any awkwardness.** Many times, we don't feel like approaching God but we must take a step, especially when our mind or emotions are wondering. Don't be afraid to ask them to do something like stand, lift their hands, sing out in the Spirit etc. Many times these are outward/natural steps that lead to an inward spiritual reality (**1 Cor 15:46 "first the natural then the spiritual**). Remember if you do ask them to take a step physically make sure you also end the step when it is over.
- **Faith that comes from hearing His word so bring the word to bear when faith seems small.** If people don't seem to be connecting it is often that they have little faith actively at work in them. You may have to give an exhortation from scripture that Jesus will use to build faith, so they approach or respond to Him.
- **Most of the time it is simply a matter of calling people to focus attention to Him.** Don't be afraid to ask God to open their senses up to Him reminding them He is there. Pray for people and lay hands on them believing God will impart a sense of Him. Many times people are unaware because they are distracted and not focused on Him.

Real connection with each other

The basic goals of small group ministry in our church centers around four things.

- Relating with God
- Relating with and serving each other
- Understanding and obedience to God's word
- Participating in His mission

Tips in helping people connect with each other during gatherings

Resist the pressure to “produce a good meeting” or preserve your reputation. Your preparation should be for the purpose of pleasing God and serving God’s people. God’s glory is your ultimate purpose. This often entails the tedious discipline of reminding and bringing people back to His truth as opposed to entertaining itching ears.

Set an atmosphere for honest interaction. God is a heart God. He dwells in heart reality not outward religious expression. Create an environment where people are free to ask questions. Leaders need to be accepting and unshockable. We are leaders that help people grow. They can’t grow if they can’t be real. For God grants grace to the humble. And humility and reality are inseparable.

Atmosphere of respect. Active listening: Listening attentively to others. Look at them, nod your head, and pay attention. We must show respect to our small group members, not simply await the opportunity to ask the next question. Remember that a discussion involves people. Our respect and love demonstrated to the group will cultivate trust

An effective leader will draw out discussion from the group based on Spiritual observation. Jesus asked 135 questions in the Gospels. He knew the answers but was helping others see themselves in light of His truth.

- *Proverbs 20:5* A person's thoughts are like water in a deep well, but someone with insight can draw them out.

Do they not understand an issue being discussed? Are they seeing it for the first time? Are they sensing conviction? Do they know how to take steps to apply it? How you respond to their responses will either facilitate the Spirit’s work or hinder it. This is a very important aspect of leadership.

Learning to flow with questions and discussion spontaneously.

Avoid distraction by chasing theological rabbits. Questions that tend to lead in that direction may be interesting, but they will not allow you to go anywhere specific, or build anything into the people.

Always bring people back to the main point of any instruction, obedience in progressively loving God with all our heart soul mind and strength and loving each other as our self.

- **1 Timothy 1:3-6** *As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, (4) nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. (5) But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. (6) For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion,*

Application leading to practical obedience. Here you get into the nitty gritty of what small groups are about. It is the place here we put into practice Jesus' words, "Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them." (John 13:17)

Have a sense in the Spirit where God wants you to go with discussion and lead towards that end.

Ask open-ended and redirecting questions to get people to respond.

When the Holy Spirit breaths on something someone shares or a heart cry that comes up pause and lift things to Him in prayer and worship.

Be Sensitive to the Holy Spirit. Be looking for His direction, and don't be afraid to follow His path. Expect the Holy Spirit to help you lead the discussion. You need to prepare effectively but also remember He loves God's people even more than you do. It is His job to lead people into truth and change hearts (John 14).

Leading a Group into Vulnerability. Show that God values it and you value it.

Engagement in His everyday mission to the earth (see page 42)

- **Hebrews 10:24-25** *and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, (25) not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.*

The life Jesus lived with the twelve was a continuation of the creation design. It can be summarized as God creating and calling His people together as a family and that family engaging in His great mission/purpose to the earth. In short "God's family together on God's mission." This is how Jesus lived with the twelve.

Book of Hebrews Small Groups

GOD ALWAYS INTENDS TO DO BIG THINGS THROUGH SMALL GROUPS

Consider how Jesus began to change the world through a group of 12. Not big things in terms of size but of influence.

Authentic Christianity lived out through local church life isn't a spectator's sport. Everyone has a part to play in the building up of His body to bring His influence in the earth through mission.

Many leaders believe that they are succeeding if they can produce a Sunday morning service which is appealing causing people to want to come. In general people are left to fend for themselves when it comes to growth and maturity. For those serious enough to want to go further Bible studies are provided for "discipleship." We must remember that having a quality Sunday Morning service is important, but they can never take the place of walking in real everyday life that is essential to shepherding people towards maturity (Eph 4:16, Col 2:19).

We are attempting to cooperate with God to help people not just gain information but bear real fruit in their lives.

"We can know the right words yet never be changed. This is the difference between information and transformation." AW Tozer

Jesus speaks of bearing fruit 26 times while being saved 13 times twice as much emphasis on bearing fruit as being saved.

- **John 15:5-16** *"I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing... (16) "You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.*

Fruit doesn't come from trying but from abiding.

Your words talk and your walk talks, but your walk always talks louder than your words.

- **1 Pet 3:15 MSG** *Through thick and thin, keep your hearts at attention, in adoration before Christ, your Master. Be ready to speak up and tell anyone who asks why you're living the way you are, and always with the utmost courtesy. Keep a clear conscience before God so that when people throw mud at you, none of it will stick.*
- **Mt 5:13-19 MSG 13** *"Let me tell you why you are here. You're here to be salt-seasoning that brings out the God-flavors of this earth. If you lose your saltiness, how will people taste godliness? You've lost your usefulness and will end up in the garbage.14-16 "Here's another way to put it: You're here to be light, bringing out the God-colors in the world. God is not a secret to be kept. We're going public with this, as public as a city on a hill. If*

I make you light-bearers, you don't think I'm going to hide you under a bucket, do you? I'm putting you on a light stand. Now that I've put you there on a hilltop, on a light stand—shine! Keep open house; be generous with your lives. By opening up to others, you'll prompt people to open up with God, this generous Father in heaven.

- **Phil 2:14-16 MSG** 14-16 *Do everything readily and cheerfully—no bickering, no second-guessing allowed! Go out into the world uncorrupted, a breath of fresh air in this squalid and polluted society. Provide people with a glimpse of good living and of the living God. Carry the light-giving Message into the night so I'll have good cause to be proud of you on the day that Christ returns. You'll be living proof that I didn't go to all this work for nothing.*

HEBREWS SMALL GROUPS

Message from Hebrews and our calling as His people/church, and our gathering together.

Background of Hebrews is much like today. Early Neronian opposition. People were losing property and their status due to their following Jesus. Some Hebrew Christians backslid to dead religion (Judaism) while others abandoned their faith altogether.

Two goals for our gatherings from the book of Hebrews. They help counteract the pressure on God's people from the world, sin, and the devil.

1. Encourage each other remain faithful to God and His voice of God by not being hardened by sin.

- **Hebrews 3:6-16** *but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house--whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (7) Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, (8) DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME, AS IN THE DAY OF TRIAL IN THE WILDERNESS, (9) WHERE YOUR FATHERS TRIED Me BY TESTING Me, AND SAW MY WORKS FOR FORTY YEARS. (10) "THEREFORE I WAS ANGRY WITH THIS GENERATION, AND SAID, 'THEY ALWAYS GO ASTRAY IN THEIR HEART, AND THEY DID NOT KNOW MY WAYS'; (11) AS I SWORE IN MY WRATH, 'THEY SHALL NOT ENTER MY REST.'" (12) Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. (13) But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called "Today," so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. (14) For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end, (15) while it is said, "TODAY IF YOU HEAR HIS VOICE, DO NOT HARDEN YOUR HEARTS, AS WHEN THEY PROVOKED ME." (16) For who provoked Him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?*

2. Encourage each other to love for one another and action in God's mission.

- **Hebrews 10:21-25** *and since we have a great priest over the house of God, (22) let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled*

clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. (23) Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; (24) and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, (25) not forsaking our own assembling together (episunagōgē), as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.

The phrase “stimulate one another” is far from the safe and sanitized form of relationships that is often imagined. The word “stimulate” means “incitement, provoke unto, contention.” It means such things as “to call into action; to arouse; to excite; to provoke anger or wrath; to provoke war; to challenge; or to stir up or arouse.”

This phrase "assembling together" is similar to other passages

- **2 Thessalonians 2:1** *Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together (episunagōgē) to Him*
- **Matthew 18:20** *"For where two or three have gathered together in My name, I am there in their midst."*

Our gatherings should result in helping people remain faithful to God and His voice as well as stimulating us towards God action.

3 BIBLICAL EXAMPLES THAT REVEAL THE EFFECT OF THE SPIRITUAL ENCOURAGEMENT THAT COMES THROUGH GATHERINGS

1. Daniel and his friends (Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego)

They had a small group together when they went into Babylon. They actually lived in the same house. *Dan 2:17-18 Then Daniel went to his house and informed his friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah (Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego), about the matter, (18) so that they might request compassion from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that Daniel and his friends would not be destroyed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon.*

The result of this small group was that they moved in God's power on mission (interpreted dreams) as well as took stands regarding their faith facing the lion's den and the fiery furnace. Their standing firm obeying the voice of God caused three significant moves of God that affected all of Babylon (Dan 2:1-18, 3:14-30, 6:1-28).

It caused rulers to influence the whole nation due to Daniel and his friend's faith

- **Dan 3:28** *Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God.*

- **Dan 6:25** Then Darius the king wrote to all the peoples, nations and men of every language who were living in all the land: "May your peace abound! (26) "I make a decree that in all the dominion of my kingdom men are to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel; For He is the living God and enduring forever, And His kingdom is one which will not be destroyed, And His dominion will be forever.

2. Jonathan and His armor bearer

They were stirred to move out and act with God against their enemies.

1 Samuel 14:6 Then Jonathan said to the young man who was carrying his armor, "Come and let us cross over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; perhaps the LORD will work for us, for the LORD is not restrained to save by many or by few." **Perhaps** – the same word.

Like Peter and John going up to the temple Acts 3:3 Tom and I going to the train depot.

3. Peter and John

Springing from the foundation of their daily life of prayer, fellowship, breaking of bread, and teaching, Peter and John engaged in mission through supernatural healing while on their way to a prayer meeting.

- **Acts 3:6** But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene--walk!"

From Orphans to Family: Expressing the Welcome of God

Family is God's organizing principle of life.

The first expression of His people in the earth who would carry "His image and likeness" was family (Gen 1:26-28). The Bible begins with God's family and ends at the great family event "The marriage supper of the Lamb which begins the eternal state of the Bride (God's people) and Jesus together forever (Rev 19:7, 9, 21:2, 9, 22:17). The whole OT revelation of the story of God was the story of Him moving through His family. Adam, Eve, and their family (Gen 1-4); Noah and his family (Gen 5-10); Abraham and His family (Gen 12-50 Isaac, Jacob, Jacob's 12 sons who became 12 family tribes who grew into a family nation); all moving as the family of God. The NT begins with Jesus calling and choosing His spiritual family and revealing Himself with and through them **Eph 3:14-15** *For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) of whom the whole family in Heaven and earth is named (name and identity)*

4 important elements affecting family in the first 4 chapters of Genesis

- **Family identity and mission (Gen 1:26-28):** "Let Us make man in Our image and Our likeness...be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, rule over and subdue it"
- **Family Expression (Gen 2):** Life in relationship in the Garden of Eden, stability of home life etc.
- **Family Opposition (Gen 3):** The enemy, temptation, and the fall causing pollution in man and a curse in the earth. That pollution caused the self serving nature to enter into man which destroys relationships and family (SIN - I at the center, Isa 53:4-6 "everyone goes their own way"). This pollution caused a shame and hiding from God and each other which destroys family.
- **Family Dysfunction (Gen 4:1-8):** The pollution in man causes Cain to kill Able out of Jealousy which released a curse in Cain that people still battle with today (The curse of Cain).

Genesis 4:5-14...(10) *He said, "What have you done? The voice of your brother's blood is crying to Me from the ground. (11) "Now you are cursed from the ground, which has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. (12) "When you cultivate the ground, it will no longer yield its strength to you; you will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth." ... 14 "Behold, You have driven me this day from the face of the ground; and from Your face I will be hidden, and I will be a vagrant and a wanderer on the earth, and whoever finds me will kill me." No rest/home and when you enter relationships they won't work.*

The idea of "fugitive" and wanderer" is unique in the Hebrew Bible. It means Cain (and those immersed in sin after his) went on to live a nomadic lifestyle as well as being excluded from the family unit (striving in relationships). Every time he starts to form family it will turn against him.

It is a breakdown of the God type security of family relationships. Obviously, the enemy is behind it because he was banished from God's family before the creation of the earth and seeks to make people orphaned from the family of God every since (Isaiah 28, Ezek 14). An Orphan constantly carries the internal questions and feelings of.

- I am rejected and/or reject-able I inevitably will be rejected by others
- I don't belong here
- I'm not wanted here
- My contribution is under-appreciated here
- People wouldn't miss me if I disappeared today
- I don't feel valued here
- I don't feel safe in relationships here
- I can't really be myself here
- If others saw the real me, they would reject me
- The old-timers don't accept me
- The new-comers don't accept me or the good things that God did here in the past

God's working in the earth culminating with Jesus was designed to heal the curse of Cain and bring spiritual orphans back into His family.

- ***Psalms 68:5-6** The God who is in his holy dwelling place is the father of the fatherless and the defender of widows. (6) God places lonely people in families. He leads prisoners out of prison into productive lives, but rebellious people must live in an unproductive land. A home for the lonely – Lonely (desolate, only like an orphan, no family)*
- ***Eph 2:19-22** MSG You're no longer strangers or outsiders. You belong here, with as much right to the name Christian as anyone. God is building a home. He's using us all—irrespective of how we got here—in what he is building.*

Two things that help break the orphanage spirit manifested in the curse of Cain

Spirit of Adoption - The work of God's Spirit as we are brought into God's family through Christ by which we realize we are adopted and wanted (Gal 4:5-7, Rom 8:15-16).

Power of the Beloved (word "beloved" is used 68 times and means "very dear, favorite, esteemed, to welcome, be fond of, to love dearly, to be pleased with, to be contented at or with a thing).

***Romans 1:7** to all who are beloved of God in Rome, called as saints: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

The manifestation of God's "Beloved" instills the following truths that replace the orphan spirit with the spirit of adoption/family.

- I belong
- I am included
- I am known
- I am desired
- I am wanted
- I am cherished
- I am treasured
- Therefore, I become a responsible son/daughter/brother/sister/father/mother. I become a dependable family member. I serve and support the family. I labor to see the family succeed and more people become a part of it through Father's love expressed through the work of Christ.

This is part of the Biblical ideas of "Justification" and "Reconciliation." Justification is God's people being freed from the sentencing and penalty of sin while Reconciliation is the establishment of friendly relationship (family) between parties who were at odds with each other. Justification without Reconciliation with God and His family is an incomplete salvation.

- **2Co 5:18-19** *Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, (19) namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation.*
- **Rom 5:10** *For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.*

Small Groups are an important part of building God's family units and drawing others into His family life.

Expressing and living in the welcome of God or which I call the life of reconciliation is part of living as God's family and seeing others become part. We as a church need to express the welcome of God to people. The welcome of God is expressing the fact that we and God love people and desire a relationship with them. This is a powerful expression of God's love.

The welcome of God is a trait God commanded throughout the Bible

It is associated with God's idea of "beloved."

Eph 1:5-6 *NASB He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, (6) to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the **Beloved**.*

Beloved - to be fond of, to love dearly, desire relationship with, to welcome or entertain.

God wants to take Strangers and Aliens (spiritual orphans suffering under the curse of Cain) and make them and part of the family (Ephesians 2:19).

In the Old Testament there were the "Laws Regarding the Stranger and Alien" designed to motivate God's people to move in His call.

- **Exo 22:21-23** *"You shall not wrong a stranger or oppress him, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt..."*
- **Exo 23:9** *"You shall not oppress a stranger, since you yourselves know the feelings of a stranger, for you also were strangers in the land of Egypt."*
- **Leviticus 19:33-34** *'When a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. (34) 'The stranger who resides with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am the LORD your God.'*
- **Deu 10:18-19** *"He executes justice for the orphan and the widow, and shows His love for the alien by giving him food and clothing. (19) "So show your love for the alien, for you were aliens in the land of Egypt. (Deu 24:19-22, Deu 27:19)*

In the New Testament it is the call to hospitality

- **Romans 12:10-13** *Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;..(13) contributing to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality.*
- **Hebrews 13:2** *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it. Hospitality - to be fond of guest, to make welcome.*

The Spiritual expression of hospitality begins with a smile. Think about the scenario in which you went into an unfamiliar office building looking for help. Once inside you encounter several desks with people busy working and some quickly glance up but get back to their work while others don't even glance at you. Then one person looks at you in the eyes and smiles. Which person would you approach. Smiling is the first step towards hospitality.

Difference between secular and Biblical Hospitality – secular goal is to impress while the Biblical role is to express welcome.

Mat 7:12 MSG *"Here is a simple, rule-of-thumb guide for behavior: Ask yourself what you want people to do for you, then grab the initiative and do it for them. Add up God's Law and Prophets and this is what you get.*

This means you have a choice. You can be a nice, friendly, approachable, authentic, easy-to-deal-with person or you can be aloof and appear to not want to make connection or get involved.

I once heard an example of the importance of hospitality in drawing people.

Imagine you have a flat tire in the middle of nowhere. Your cell phone has no service. You're stuck! So, you walk into town seeking help. Later, you come across two houses on opposite sides of the road. One is dark, deserted and dilapidated. The other has its lights on and a family sitting out on the front porch who greeted you. Which house would you choose? The people on the front porch gave friendly vibes that helped people feel comfortable approaching them.

You can go into the average church and ask “how many of you are greeters?” Usually only a handful of people will respond. How sad is that? According to the Bible we are all to practice hospitality which means making people feel welcome (by being approachable) *Rom 12:13, Heb 13:2*. We are all greeters everyday inside and outside the four walls of the church building

We must remember that coworkers, associates, people in our neighborhood are probably stressed out, dealing with personal issues, health issues, and marital problems etc. Either they feel like they can come to you or not. **If they can see that your porch light is on as you are around them, you have an incredible opportunity to stand on your front porch and minister to them.**

How do we practice hospitality?

- **Make room in your hearts for others** - Starts here with a heart issue. Couples who know a baby is coming make room in their hearts.
- **Be aware of the strangers and visitors in our midst and make them feel welcome.** One of the best ways to do this is to see yourself as a host when strangers are among you. Meet them and make sure you introduce them to others. Go to them, make them feel welcome, get their name, etc. If we are just consumed with ourselves we will often just go to people we are comfortable with and talk about our own issues. God wants us to serve others.
- **Realize it is all our responsibility to reach out and make people feel welcome.** It is so easy to rely on the extroverts or the greeters to make people feel welcome. The Bible says that in the church “every joint supplies as each part does its work.” On Sunday mornings or any other gathering try to make it early because we are all there to minister. Most visitors are on time because they feel nervous in a new and unfamiliar place.
- **Practice strategic hospitality** – Get others involved with you. Jesus sent them out two by two. Make your home or meeting place a launching pad for ministry. What mix of people getting together would help the stranger or alien the most.
- **Practice wartime hospitality** – Nothing is fancy in war. Paper plates, Wal Mart chicken, etc. We aren't trying to impress but make people feel welcome.

Story about *My First Sunday at Your Church.*

Today I visited your church. I looked up the address, called the church office for service times, and got myself and my three children ready on time.

We're new in town, and this is the fourth church we've visited. We step inside, hopeful. Perhaps here I'll find help teaching the Word to our children. Perhaps here we'll grow spiritually. Or maybe we'll receive the same welcome we got at the other churches.

"Good morning! And isn't it a fantastic day!" says the greeter, handing us programs. "Yes. I'm so glad it's cooling off." "Are you visiting?" he asks. "Yes. We just moved here." "Isn't that grand!" he says, stepping back and looking over our shoulders. "Mr. Charlie! And how are you today?" Evidently everyone has taken the same greeter class. Again and again someone offers a limp hand saying, "I'm so glad you came," without smiling at all, quickly moving on, job finished. I am

itching to ask about the women's Bible study, choir practice, and Sunday school. But then they're gone, chatting with a good friend in the next pew.

After wandering around between Sunday school and church, trying to find a door to the sanctuary that doesn't open into the choir pit, we're late. The sanctuary is nearly full, but there's one empty row—at the very front. So we walk past hundreds of eyes, "new people" on parade. As we settle the kids, a lady on the end whispers to someone behind her, "I just don't know where John and Steve are going to sit now." I chose the deacons' row. I cringe and turn, searching for another pew to move my family to, but the place is packed and the music is starting. After the service, I buckle my children into the car, pile the take-home papers and Bibles on the dash, and I start to cry.

This is a true story. I have visited four churches over the last three months, and I am frustrated and disheartened enough to quit church altogether. Why has it been so difficult to find a church home?

I have been an active church member, someone people called for counsel and prayer, someone my pastor called if he needed help with a project. We're in a new town, and I don't mind starting over. And the new church doesn't have to be just like the one back home. But, I think, we should be made to feel welcome.

Small group leaders need to strive to make any gatherings or missional ventures full of the welcome of God. It is not only about being warm and inviting yourself but continually motivating God's people to have the welcome of God in them cooperating with Holy Spirit to see the curse of Cain broken off of people's lives.

Small Groups and Mission

Jesus' pattern that He walked in on earth was being joined with a small group of disciples following Him together as a family while they engaged in His mission.

Mark 3:14-35 *And He appointed twelve, so that they would be with Him and that He could send them out to preach, (15) and to have authority to cast out the demons...(33) Answering them, He *said, "Who are My mother and My brothers?" (34) Looking about at those who were sitting around Him, He *said, "Behold My mother and My brothers! (35) "For whoever does the will of God, he is My brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 9-11, Luke 9-10).*

Important: Trying to build and facilitate a sense of family in small groups without mission will cause family to become a self serving consumer driven experience. Trying to build missional group activities without family will not express the nature and image of God.

A family who is sent: Jesus sends His family of disciples to be laborer's in His harvest. In MT 9-11 and Lk 9-10 He sends them out in pairs and goes as a group. It is family on mission.

- **Mat 9:35-38** *Jesus was going through all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every kind of disease and every kind of sickness. (36) Seeing the people, He felt compassion for them, because they were distressed and dispirited like sheep without a shepherd. (37) Then He *said to His disciples, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. (38) "Therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into His harvest."*
- **Mat 10:1-42** *Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness....(5) These twelve Jesus sent out after instructing them: "Do not go in the way of the Gentiles, and do not enter any city of the Samaritans; (6) but rather go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.... (11) "And whatever city or village you enter, inquire who is worthy in it, and stay at his house until you leave that city... (remember that He sent them out two by two)*
- **Luk 9:1-3** *And He called the twelve together, and gave them power and authority over all the demons and to heal diseases. (2) And He sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to perform healing. (3) And He said to them, "Take nothing for your journey, neither a staff, nor a bag, nor bread, nor money; and do not even have two tunics apiece.*
- **Luk 10:1-3** *Now after this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them in pairs ahead of Him to every city and place where He Himself was going to come. (2) And He was saying to them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; therefore beseech the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. (3) "Go; behold, I send you out as lambs in the midst of wolves.*
- **John 17:18** *"As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.*
- **Joh 20:21** *So Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you; as the Father has sent Me, I also send you."*

- **Matthew 28:18-20** *And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. (19) "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, (20) teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."*

Embracing missions as a way of life in Small Groups

Missions isn't a program but a way of life. In our small groups missions isn't a special emphasis for certain seasons but is to be part of our way of life together as His family. We need to see ourselves cooperating with God accessing His grace to help people who need to know Jesus every day. Missions is everyone, everywhere, all the time. It is across the street and across the ocean. Both are important.

If we understand that missions and ministry is everywhere, all the time, and that our goal is redemption through the gospel then it becomes a way of life. What do I want for my children? Redemption. What do I want for my neighbors? Redemption. What do I want for my husband or wife? Redemption. What do I want for my coworkers? Redemption. What do I want for the shop keeper that I meet three or four times a week? Redemption. What do I want for my neighbors? Redemption. I want to be a part of that everyday all the time. By the touch of my hand, by the tone of my voice, by the look on my face I want to represent the One who has sent me to people around me everyday.

Jesus' Grand Strategy for Missions

Jesus didn't establish ministries, run projects, create programs, or events. What was His grand strategy and cutting edge program? He walked with the 12 and often ate meals, personally interacted with people, and revealed God's Kingdom in the midst of it. *Mt 11:19 The Son of Man came eating and drinking, and they say, 'Look at him! A glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!' Yet wisdom is justified by her deeds."*

Two types of Everyday Missions

Along the Way Mission: A focus on normal rhythms of life, like the good Samaritan on a journey, or in the journey of your everyday life (Mt 9-11, Lk 9-10).

Intentional Mission: Targeting an area or group like people in your neighborhood that you intentionally go to. We cannot assume people will come to us, we must go to them!

In our small group families we are looking for opportunities to engage in both along the way and intentional missions. Here are some ideas to help walk in both.

- Have a hang out at various parks evening with snacks or a picnic. You may want to split up the group to cover two parks, or have a park rotation.
- Split up into groups and prayer walk your neighborhood and look for ways to engage and pray for neighbors. Pray for any needs you come across with people especially healing (Mt 10:8, Lk 10:9)

- Have your group host hospitality after Sunday services once a month. If you prepare and there are no visitors then invite other church members. Meals together are always valuable.
- Gather in coffee shops for an evening and express hospitality to others. Some groups actually rent a time to buy coffee for any others who come in during their time of meeting there.
- Meet in the front yard during warmer months to be visible. Sit in yard, play with the kids, do a special activity so you can chat with passing neighbors.
- Take your group to a sporting event or other activities. This can be your own people or people you are trying to reach. This can make a great impact on a single mother or family you are reaching out to. Also getting out as a group to these types of events, even those of your own members, will get you out and visible.
- Have a front yard block party, ice cream social, or cookout for neighbors.
- Host a backyard theater and show a movie in warm months (in cold months inside).
- Serve a co worker, neighbor, etc., who you know has a need. If someone has been in the hospital or has some sort of injury prepare meals for them, help them with cleaning their house or taking care of their yard etc.
- Invite people over. Have coffee, refreshments, or dinner.
- Picnic at the neighborhood park.
- During the Christmas season, facilitate a Christmas caroling event, inviting your neighbors to participate with hot chocolate and cider at the end.

Embrace the Biblical Theology of Eating. Look for ways to have meals or something around the table (coffee, desserts etc.).

There are three ways the New Testament completes the sentence, 'The Son of Man came...' 'The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many' (Mark 10:45); 'The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost' (Luke 19:10); 'The Son of Man has come eating and drinking ...' (Luke 7:34). The first two are statements of purpose. The third is a statement that is descriptive. How did Jesus come? He came eating and drinking."

Jesus spent much of His time eating and drinking. His mission strategy often included a long meal, stretching into the evening. He did evangelism and discipleship round a table with some grilled fish, a loaf of bread, and a pitcher of wine. Luke's Gospel is full of stories of Jesus eating with people. In most of the book Jesus is either going to a meal, at a meal, or coming from a meal when Kingdom activity happens.

- In Luke 5 Jesus eats with tax collectors and sinners at the home of Levi.
- In Luke 7 Jesus is anointed at the home of Simon the Pharisee during a meal.
- In Luke 9 Jesus feeds the five thousand.
- In Luke 10 Jesus eats in the home of Martha and Mary.
- In Luke 11 Jesus condemns the Pharisees and teachers of the law at a meal.
- In Luke 14 Jesus is at a meal when he urges people to invite the poor to their meals rather than their friends.
- In Luke 19 Jesus invites himself to dinner with Zacchaeus.
- In Luke 22 we have the account of the Last Supper.
- In Luke 24 the risen Christ has a meal with the two disciples in Emmaus, and then later eats fish with the disciples in Jerusalem.

Ideas based on a missional acronym BELLS to engage in the pattern of Luke 9-10, Matthew 9-11 family on mission

Bless - When the Bible was being translated into Old English, the term was chosen to translate the Latin *benedicere* and Greek *eulogein*, both of which have the meaning “to speak well of, to praise.” Later, the meaning shifted toward “pronounce or make happy.” Blessing someone is to help relieve the burden of their life. They are listening to lies and avoiding fears. Blessing works to lift it. **Good Habit - *I will bless three people this week—at least one of whom is not a member of our church.***

Three ways to bless

- **Words of Affirmation** - word or note, lets them know they are noticed. Mark Twain once said, “I can live for two months on a good compliment.” I’ve heard it said that a word of encouragement is like oxygen to the soul.
- **Acts of Kindness** - Who doesn’t feel blessed when someone does them a favor or provides some kind of practical support? Cutting an old lady’s lawn. Babysitting an exhausted couple’s kids. Helping a neighbor move. These acts of kindness literally lift up and bring strength to others.
- **Gifts** - a thoughtful gift lets people know they are known, cared for and valued.

Blessers often have more impact than Converters. Mark Russell in his book *Missional Entrepreneur* reveals a study that was performed on two different missionary teams that were going to the country of Thailand. Two teams, one went to start businesses and be a blessing to people wherever they can, the other went with idea of conversions, crusades preaching. After 5 years, blessers had a great social impact and 50 times as many conversions and the converters.

EAT - You already eat 21 meals a week how about inviting others into one

LISTEN - Listen to people, their struggles, their pains, in the places God sent you. Listen to the Spirit's promptings and what He says in prayer about people you are around every day.

LEARN - Learn from the examples of Jesus as He interacted with people.

Serve - Jesus came not to be served but to serve and give His life (Mt 20:20-28, Mk 10:45).

Helping God's People Connect with Him in Small Gatherings

God's place among His people

- **2Co 6:16**...For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "**I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE.**"
- **Exo 29:46**...I am the LORD their God who brought them out of the land of Egypt, **that I might dwell among them**...(see Exo 25:8, Lev 26:12, Num 5:3, 16:3, Deut 6:15, 7:21, 23:14, 15, 32:51, Ps 22:3, 46:4, 1Pe 2:9-11, Ex 19:5, Dt 4:20, 7:6, 14:2, Ps 135:4, Mal 3:17, Tit 2:14, Eph 2:19-22, 1 Tim 3:15).

Jesus showed us the amazing design of God among small groups of His people

- **Matthew 18:19-20**...(20) For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."

His presence among His people is the distinguishing mark that makes His people different from all other people (Ex 13:33-38, Mt 18:20, 2 Cor 6:16, Rev 1:12-20).

Westerners like big and we can subtly minimize the importance of a small gathering of God's people in small out of the way places. **Important to remember Jesus led a small group (joined together family on mission) for 3 years and never traveled more than 100 miles from His hometown. What makes the ordinary extraordinary is "God among us."**

Leaders need to always be aware of His design and do everything they can to see people connect with Him as He is "among them." I want to give some tips and wisdom in helping others connect with God in gatherings, primarily smaller ones. They are uniquely challenging for leaders in helping people connect with Jesus among them. In larger gatherings there are certain expectations and aids to help people connect (worship teams, prayer times etc.), that are not at smaller gatherings.

Two erroneous extremes in connecting with God among us

1. We only have real connection with Him when His people are experientially "undone" by Him. At the dedication of Solomon's temple (2 Chron 25:13-14), or John on Patmos (Rev 1:12-18), people couldn't stand or speak in His presence.

2. It is a mysterious connection in our heart which is often more of an assumption than reality. In this posture there is no tangible attempt to help people connect with Him. He is just silently there and people invisibly connect with Him in their heart. It is like some Jewish Passover meals in which they have an empty cup and chair for Elijah to come at some point to join them, yet the chair and cup are always empty.

Small group gatherings often face the second extreme more than the first. In some gatherings you would hardly know Jesus was there. The leaders talk "about Him" or it is fellowship focused with one another and you would hardly know He is there. It is much like Jesus standing outside of the gathering of the lukewarm church at Laodicea trying to get them to open the door so He can come in an "dine with them" (*Rev 3:20*).

There is often a "prayer request" time but little attention is given to Jesus being exalted or connecting with Him. I often wonder what someone from another planted who was sent to investigate what Christian small group gatherings were about would report after attending one?

"They believe their God is mysteriously around them but mostly He is invisible and silent. They don't give Him much attention. There is an expectation that He will move when they ask Him to in order to make their life free of hardships and go the way they want. I conclude that the Christians God and small group gatherings is about silently standing by His people in order to help them have lives free of trouble or challenge."

13 tips in helping people connect with God during Mt 18:20 gatherings

It is good for leaders to realize that people have big fears that affect them. One of the biggest fears everyone has is the fear of public embarrassment and public speaking. Those things can hinder people from speaking out and praying when gathered among God's people. There are things that leaders can do to help them overcome those challenges and help people lead out and connect with God.

1. Realize afresh that this is God's design. He is not wanting to be a silent guest. We do everything we can to call attention to Him. We don't want to be like Martha who was busy doing things **for** Jesus but **ignoring Him** as He was right there in her house (Lk 10:38-41).

- *Col 1:18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that **He Himself will come to have first place in everything.***

2. Don't yield to condemnation that you can't rally lead people to connect with Him, or that He won't reveal Himself. You may not be a worship leader, Bible Scholar, or prophet but you can call people to connect with Him. We are not trying to reproduce certain types of corporate gatherings we are simply connecting with Him and each other.

3. Help people overcome the common fear of speaking, singing, or praying in front of other people. Little well placed comments can help ease this fear and prime the pump to

connect with Him. *"I want a few of you to pray out and remember there are no perfect prayers. God just want us to use honest speech and we are all in the same boat of being nervous about singing or praying in front of others. Lest encourage each other as they pray out okay?"* Or something like, *"we are going to worship and there is no music. Don't worry how you sound because God said make a joyful noise. God loves us to sing to Him (quote a couple of the passages that refer to this).* Do everything you can to help people be at ease to step out to pray, sing, or prophesy.

4. Encourage people give feedback as others lead out in prayer. Jesus speaks of the "prayer of agreement." Most people would be nervous if they were speaking to someone who gave them not indication or response about how they were receiving what was being said. Tell the group if they agree to give feedback (saying yes, amen, or some other indication of agreement). We are not just listening to others pray we are praying with them.

5. Help people overcome any condemnation about their own lack of consistent personal prayer or worship life. At any moment none of us are worthy based on our performance to pray in front of others and condemnation will try to hinder people from praying out. Bring up something like, *we are going to pray, and you may not have had a good day or week in your personal walk but Jesus. Remember He stands like the Father looking for the prodigal son/daughter to come home and will run to meet you and cover your shame. Go ahead and move towards Him, He will receive us. The bigger problem is to stay away from Him when He wants us to come to Him.*

6. Listen for the Spirit for things the people may be struggling with and address them with Spiritual insight.

7. Remind people regularly of the Biblical ways of entering His presence.

- *Psa 100:2-4 Come before Him with joyful singing...4 Enter His gates with thanksgiving And His courts with praise. Give thanks to Him, bless His name.*
- *Col 4:2 Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.*

8. Encourage people to connect honestly from the heart. We don't want to have empty religion as Jesus said, *Mar 7:6-7...it is written: 'THIS PEOPLE HONORS ME WITH THEIR LIPS, BUT THEIR HEART IS FAR AWAY FROM ME. 7 'BUT IN VAIN DO THEY WORSHIP ME.* The Biblical idea of "heart" means our "inward vitality or focus."

9. Remember that connecting with Him is job #1. You may have revelation of what you would like to speak about or help people see during the gathering but it will be fruitless apart from Him ("apart from Me you can do nothing" Jn 15:5).

10. Have confidence that you can lead people to connect with Him. Leaders often fear that if they step out people will sit and watch instead of participate. Don't give into that fear a call people to participate even if there are awkward pauses.

11. Calling for outward Biblical postures can help overcome any awkwardness. Many times, we don't feel like approaching God but we must take a step, especially when our mind or emotions are wondering. Don't be afraid to ask them to do something like stand, lift their hands, sing out in the Spirit etc. Many times, these are outward/natural steps that lead to an inward spiritual reality (1 Cor 15:46 "first the natural then the spiritual). Remember if you do ask them to take a step physically make sure you also end the step when it is over.

12. Faith that comes from hearing His word so bring the word to bear when faith seems small. If people don't seem to be connecting it is often that they have little faith actively at work in them. You may have to give an exhortation from scripture that Jesus will use to build faith so they approach or respond to Him.

13. Most of the time it is simply a matter of calling people to focus attention to Him. Don't be afraid to ask God to open their senses up to Him reminding them He is there. Pray for people and lay hands on them believing God will impart a sense of Him. Many times, people are unaware because they are distracted and not focused on Him.