



50 Days of Irresistible Community

Part I



**Understanding God's Heart
for Authentic Christian Community**

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2008

Spiritual Growth Opportunities

Our desire is that The **LIFEhouse** Church will be a warm healthy spiritual environment where everyone is actively seeking to grow to spiritual maturity in Christ. We take the command of Jesus very seriously that instructs us to make disciples (students) of Christ to the ends of the earth. The following materials are the tools we use to help people to begin and maintain this lifelong process of obediently following our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. If you are connected to a **LIFEgroup**, be sure to ask the leader for assistance as you continue this marvelous life changing process!

Trail Guide:

- **Spiritual Growth Map**

Basics of the Faith:

- **Knowing Jesus As Lord**
- **Experiencing God's Forgiveness**
- **Experiencing God's Power**
- **Experiencing God's Love**

Essentials:

- **Third Time Visitor Reception.**
- **What is The LIFEhouse Church? (Welcome Dessert)**
- **Firm Foundations (8 week rotating midweek class)**
- **Baptism Education Class (1 hour)**
- **How to Belong to The LIFEhouse?**
- **LIFEgroup (small group) involvement?**
- **New Member Reception?**
- **Serving in a Ministry**
- **Mentoring Ministry**

Electives – Values:

- **Climbing Essentials: The Disciplines of the Faith**
- **Little Communities in the Kingdom of God**
- **God's Design for His Church (spiritual gifts assessment)**
- **Jesus, Teach Us to Pray (The Lord's Prayer)**
- **Growing Toward Spiritual Maturity**
- **Doing Battle in the Heavens**
- **God's Heart for His Church (Part 1 & 2)**
- **Prayer Evangelism**
- **Seeking God's Heart for Prayer**

"Irresistible Communities in the Kingdom of God"

Understanding God's Heart for Authentic Christian Community

Preface:

The **LIFEhouse** Church *Spiritual Growth Track* was developed in a devotional format for use in **LIFEgroups**, but also as a personal devotional tool.

We dream of involving 100% of our congregation in a **LIFEgroup**. We desire that every member will be equipped to actively contribute to the ongoing ministry of the church. We are an "every member a minister" ministry, where every person is expected to be a player in the Divine drama unfolding every day as God empowers and enables us to build the kingdom of God.

This study is one of several that is designed to help believers grow to spiritual maturity in the context of our **LIFEgroups** (small groups). We believe that the **LIFEgroup** is the best environment for life transformation, transparency, and personal accountability. Believing that discipleship involves both a relationship and direction, our prayer is that these tools will assist many in obeying Jesus' command to make disciples of all nations.

The **LIFEgroup** structure of our church represents the wineskin, but the real focus of our church is the "wine" where we experience the presence and power of the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst.

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DAY 1

God Lives in a WEEK Little Community 1

Our Theology should precede our methodology. This means that before we consider how the church should be organized, and structured to foster authentic Christian community, we need to understand God's heart, God's perspective on the type of community that He desires to create in His church.

God has chosen to exist in perfect unity, which we call the Trinity. This is the perfect example of "common—unity." While there is no struggle for unity within the Godhead, life on this planet has proven that mankind is "common-unity challenged." People yearn for community by participating in chat-rooms with people they have never seen. They watch "Friends" on TV hoping they get the feel of belonging, even if it is vicariously through fictional characters on a sitcom. People are yearning for a place where "everybody knows your name."

Intuitively, every person identifies with the desire to belong to a community with transparency, openness and vulnerability. However, like a bunch of porcupines trying to huddle up to keep warm, every time we start to get close to others we feel the quills of our humanness begin to poke and drive us apart.

What does it mean that we are a church of LIFEgroups? The **LIFEhouse** Church is made up of small groups of eight to fifteen people who meet together regularly to seek the presence of Jesus in their midst (Matthew 18:20).

There are at least six major benefits of being in a small "**LIFEgroup**":

- You experience the love and care of being a participant in God's family;
- You grow in your understanding of God's Word;
- You have a natural way to reach your friends, family and

neighbors for Christ;

- You are given an opportunity to discover and meaningfully use your spiritual gifts;
- You will develop a more meaningful prayer life;
- You are a part of something much bigger than yourself.

Is that unique from other churches? If so, how? It is a challenge for every church to avoid becoming institutionalized and stagnant. Churches, like the individual members of which they are composed, have a tendency to lose their first love for God (See the Ephesian Church in Revelation 2). The New Testament church as we observe in the book of Acts was vibrant with life and vitality.

The chart that begins on the following page (Page 6-9) reflects the symptoms of a church that has become an institution, and how we hope to overcome this tendency by being a church "of" *LIFEgroups* where every member is actively participating in the life of the church. We desire to experience the purpose, presence and power of Christ in the same manner as the New Testament church. Take some time right now to review the chart and write down which points you agree with and which you find in error:



	The Institutional Church	The New Testament Church
Location of Ministry	Meets in Church Buildings, at specific times	Anywhere, at any time. Moved from House to House (Acts 5:42; 20:20; Romans 16:3-5)
Size of Groups	Large, Impersonal Groups	Small, Intimate Groups (Romans 16:10, 11; Philemon 1:2)
Senior Pastor's duty	The Professional Minister: preach good sermons, counsel, administer programs, visit members, conduct weddings, funerals... Omni-competent	One of many ministers. Model the life of a believer by abiding in the vine and equipping others to do the work (1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Corinthians 11:1; Eph. 4)
Source for Securing Pastoral Staff	Trained Professional Clergy	Servant workers developed within; tested before they are set apart for ministry (Matthew 20:25-28; 1 Timothy 3:8-10)
Crisis Support System	Problem? See the Pastor	Building up "one another" (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)
Basic Ministry	Spectators of Weekly Worship Services. Usually no more than 70 people set the agenda for the programs of the church, regardless the size.	Participants in daily fellowship; Actively making Disciples of Christ (Matt 28:18-20; Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:13). Every member a minister ministry.
Relationships	Remote, little transparency	Intimate, helping one another (Acts 4:32-35; Ephesians 4:15, 16)

	The Institutional Church	The New Testament Church
Measurement of Spiritual Growth	Class, notebooks; little modeling, values not shaped - Hellenistic, Academic Leadership Development Environment (Pharisees)	Relational Leadership Development Environment; Lifestyle; influence through modeling where personal values are shaped (2 Timothy 2:2)
Primary tasks of leaders	Directing and promoting programs and meetings. Recruiting people to maintain existing programs	Every believer equipped to do the work of the ministry as God leads (Ephesians 4:11, 12) Help people to dream new dreams of what can be to the glory of God.
Prayer life	Individual choice, limited	Heavy emphasis (Acts 3:1; 12:12; Colossians 4:2-4, 12). Nothing begins without prayer.
Expectations of members	Attendance, tithing, support and work in the “programs”	Ministering to others, total servant hood and stewardship (Romans 12:3-8; 1 Corinthians 4:1)
Teachings	Subscribe to the distinctive beliefs and unique doctrines of this church	Focus on the absolutes of scripture, and primary purpose of the church. Apply Scriptures to needs in the context of relationships (2 Timothy 3:13-17)
Concept of Church	Organization/Institution	Organism/Body

	The Institutional Church	The New Testament Church
Believers' Attitudes	Enjoy “membership” as in a club. Are concerned about what others think about “our” church.	Fully functioning members of the body of Christ worldwide. Concerned about what God thinks.
The Head/Government	The People - Democracy - Focus of leaders: representing the people to the board (bottom up). Concern is for what the people want and keeping them happy.	Jesus Christ - Theocracy - Focus of leaders: representing God to the people (top down). Concern is for what the people need.
Board	Administrators, decision makers: pre-occupied with facilities, budgets and business meetings	Involved in the life of the ministry. Working together to equip the saints for ministry while setting policy and overseeing the finances.
Selection of Leadership	Election by popular vote of the people	The call of God. Appointment based on observable emotional stability, spiritual maturity, and ministry skills
Spiritual gifts	Either ignored or used as a crowd-pleaser in public services. Spiritual gift education used as a means of recruitment for leadership, keeping programs running.	Regularly exercised by all believers to build up others in small group meetings (1 Peter 4:1) Discovery and identification of Spiritual Gifts made in the context of active service.
Commitment	To enlarge the institution; uniformity	To increase Christ’s Kingdom, Unity, Body life (1 Corinthians 1:9, 10; John 17:3, 20, 21)

	The Institutional Church	The New Testament Church
Evaluation	Revelation 3:1 Church of Sardis - "you are alive, but you are dead"	Ephesians 4:11-16 The body is alive and growing - being built up.
Vision Casting	Everyone Challenged to buy into the Pastor's Vision (Top down)	The Pastor serves by equipping the people to carry out the vision that God gives to each individual (Bottom up). The people are "players" in the adventure of building the kingdom of God.
Great Commission	Compete with other churches for market share (addition)	"Go make disciples." (Matthew 28:19, 20) (multiplication)
Perspective	The corporate worship service is the focal point	The small group of believers is the focal point (Mark 3:13-15)



History of Small Groups: Exodus 18

The need for sharing the load of responsibility in the church is nothing new. As a matter of fact, it is as old as Moses. Moses was carrying a heavy load of responsibility for leading the nation of Israel. Evidently his wife complained to her father that Moses was working too hard, coming in late from the office, and the kids were missing their father. Jethro, Moses father in law, encouraged Moses to delegate responsibility to others who could oversee thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. They could handle the simple problems, and only the tough situations needing wise decisions would make it to Moses. The purpose was to prevent Moses from wearing out trying to handle the counseling load for the entire nation, and from frustrating the people who had to wait in such long lines to receive a hearing from Moses.

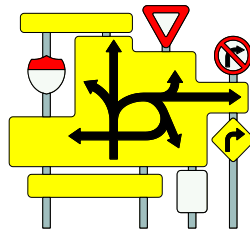
The New Testament church followed the same pattern as believers gathered in small groups from house to house. **For 300 years the church experienced explosive growth!**

The Institutional Church

"By 312 A.D., the church had changed from regular home meetings and large group meetings to almost exclusively conducting meetings in special buildings. Consequently, the church became an audience! Since that time many things have differed from church to church, theological interpretation, type of worship and even clothes clergy wear. But the one-winged, cathedral structure has remained constant over the past seventeen centuries of church history." (The Second Reformation, by Bill Beckham, Touch Publications, 1995)

Then in the late 1800's with the desire to help people become more than an audience, many churches in America were organized by committee. What does that mean? Some have said that a camel is a horse put together by a committee!?! With the desire to get people involved and feel a sense of ownership, many churches thought that by giving decision making power to people, it would lead to greater participation in the life of the church.

This led to countless committees, hundreds and thousands of hours of committee work deciding on the color of the carpet, and the paint for the doors. Though many details were being handled by committees, they became famous for the lively political squabbles over non-essentials, while the purpose of the church to make Disciples of Christ was put on the back burner. Very little was being accomplished in terms of spiritual growth in the lives of people. Very few were growing in Christ likeness or in reaching people with the Gospel. There just wasn't time!



In all fairness, with the busyness of committee work, there was a genuine and sincere effort to do the ministry and there were some good things that resulted. But many people were sitting around saying, "I thought Jesus said, 'Go ye.' All we seem to be doing is "meet ye." Is this what church is really all about?"

In the New Testament we find people working for the Lord, praying, and absorbed in the Scriptures and overflowing with the life of God. They were not preoccupied with committee work. They were occupied with God Himself.

Like Martha in the New Testament most of us know how to do things for God, but too few know how to "be" in the presence of God like Mary (Luke 10:38-42). The real question is "How are we to be the church?" Not just "What are we to do" in the church. What form does it take?

Are we to reach people for Christ? Yes.

Are we to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ? Yes.

Do decisions have to be made? Every day!

Are people in real need? Every moment!

God has been clearly leading us to become a church "of" **LIFEgroups**. We want what is on God's heart for His church — what He created it to be. The small group is the very way He Himself has chosen to live. God wants to build community. The

blocks with which God wants us to build are not committee meetings, programs and events, but relationships in little communities— *LIFEgroups*, leadership teams. The focus of these *LIFEgroups* is on loving God, and loving one another to within an inch of our lives, and extending that love to those who have yet to know Christ.

After spending a great deal of time searching the scriptures, and in prayer, we are convinced that a church "of" *LIFEgroups* is what God has on His heart for us. This *LIFEgroup* structure is like the wineskin that holds the wine. We need wineskins, but the focus is the wine, the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ in our midst. Each *LIFEgroup* is to be a safe place where people can share unsafe things. It is a place where people learn and grow and are cared for so that they can become equipped to shepherd others.

Jesus was heartbroken as he saw people in need of a shepherd. Matthew 9:36-38 expresses Jesus' heart for people and the need for God honoring leaders with a heart to shepherd the people, "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.'" NIV

Jesus told us to pray to the Lord of the harvest to send forth laborers for the harvest field. We are asking for people who sincerely desire to reap the ripe harvest of souls in our area. We are learning together what it means to love God with all our heart, mind, soul and strength. Love one another as Jesus loves us, and through our natural contacts in life spread that love to those who do not know Jesus.

Make Matthew 9:36-38 your prayer right now. Write out your prayer on the lines below _____

Discipleship has been defined as a "relationship with direction".

Are you in a relationship with others who are committed to growing to maturity in Christ? If not, why not? _____





DAY 2

Community Is at the Heart of God Part 1



Read Genesis 1:1-3

God in Community

This passage shows us how God lived and existed in Himself.

"... **God created** ..." verse 1 The Father, Creator

"... **the Spirit of God was hovering**" verse 2. Here we are introduced to the Holy Spirit Who is God bringing this creation into a form.

"**And God said** ..." verse 3 God spoke. The Word of God is the Son of God— Jesus. **John 1:1 "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was with God in the beginning. 3 Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made."**

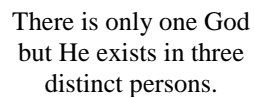
The Trinity

Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Scripture makes abundantly clear a concept that is very difficult to grasp. There is only one God but He exists in three distinct persons. For centuries Christians have referred to this truth as the Trinity. The word "Trinity" is never found in Scripture but it is a word that describes the One God as three distinct persons— multiplicity in unity.

The simplest way I know to explain the Trinity is:

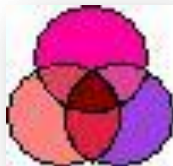
if you go through the Bible you will find a long list of verses that say:

- ❖ There is one God.
- ❖ God the Father is God.
- ❖ Jesus, the Son is God.
- ❖ The Holy spirit is God.



There is only one God
but He exists in three
distinct persons.

There are four long lists of verses that conclude that one God exists as three distinct persons. Our mathematical minds say, "But, $1 + 1 + 1 = 3$." God says, "No. There is only one Me." It is more like multiplication where " $1 \times 1 \times 1 = 1$."



The Moody Handbook of Theology defines the Trinity this way, "The Trinity of God is a doctrine that is fundamental to the Christian faith; belief or disbelief in the Trinity marks orthodoxy from unorthodoxy. Human reason, however, cannot fathom the Trinity, nor can logic explain it, and, although the word itself is not found in the Scriptures, the doctrine is plainly taught in the Scriptures. The early church was forced to study the subject and affirm its truth because of the heretical teachings that arose opposing the Trinity.

The term *Trinity* is not the best one because it emphasizes only the three persons but not the unity within the Trinity. The German word *Dreieinigkeit* ("three-oneness") better expresses the concept. A proper definition then must include the distinctness and equality of the three persons within the Trinity as well as the unity within the Trinity. The word *Triunity* may better express the doctrine. A proper definition of the Trinity states: "the Trinity is composed of three united Persons without separate existence—so completely united as to form one God. The divine nature subsists in three distinctions—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit." (Moody Bible Handbook)

But our key question still remains, "Why is God a Trinity?" God reveals Himself to us as a little community. God, Who could live or exist any way He pleased, exists in community. God lives, works and communicates within a little community, a small group, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In this little group are all the essentials of community life lived out in perfect harmony— mutual love, mutual submission, giving to and receiving from one another.

"Why is God a Trinity?"

John Samaan meditated upon this idea in a "Servants Among the Poor" newsletter: ". . . within God's very nature is a divine `rhythm'

or pattern of continuous giving and receiving— not only love, but also glory, honor, life . . . each in its fullness. Think about it for a minute. God the Father loves and delights in the Son (Matthew 3:17), Jesus receives that love and pleases His Father as an obedient loving Son (John 8:29), and honors the Spirit (Matthew 12:31), while the Spirit glorifies both the Father and the Son (John 16:14). Each person in the Trinity loves, honors, and glorifies the other and receives love and honor back from the others, because He is worthy. There is never any lack."

God's nature exhibits "community". What would "community" look like in our church if it accurately reflected the Trinity of God? (Use your imagination)



Community Is at the Heart of God, Part 2

As Christians have thought about God over the centuries and as we have talked about Him, we tend to focus on His "big three" qualities:

- ❖ all knowing— omniscience
- ❖ all powerful— omnipotence
- ❖ ever present—omnipresence



These are important to know and understand because God is limitless, He cannot be confined and He has no equal. But we tend not to think of God as personal. We elevate Him to a point where it becomes impossible for us to relate to Him. But Jesus came and related to us as the God-Man. He sent the Holy Spirit as another Comforter to lead and guide us. He desires to relate to us

personally.

The Trinity of God Reveals Relationship

What the great mystery of the Trinity shows us is that God exists in community. His very essence reveals community which speaks of relationship. How the Father, Son and Holy Spirit relate to one another is how we are called to relate to one another.

Ministry of God in the Trinity

One in redemption: Jesus died for our sins. **"God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself."** 2 Corinthians 5:19. We are born again by the Holy Spirit— John 3:8.

One in the resurrection: **"God raised Him (Jesus) from the dead."** Acts 2:24 Jesus said, **"I have authority to lay it (my life) down and authority to take it up again."** John 10:18 Jesus was raised from the dead by the Holy Spirit— Romans 8:11.

One in sanctification: Though the Holy Spirit is primary, **"God made Christ our sanctification."** 2 Thess 2:2. We learn from the interaction of the persons of the Godhead how we are to live together in little communities. God wants us to live in a little community and to gather for worship.

The early church lived out its faith as they functioned in little communities. They loved God and each other. They were willing to die for each other and some did die. They were energized by the power of God through His Holy Spirit as they came together to worship Him, to care for one another, to seek God's face, and to make sure there was no need among any of them. That is how they were the church.

Look back through today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more ideas He wants you to understand, learn or apply to your life.

Ask God to show you ways to build "community" at home and work. Write down what He reveals to you:

DAY 4

Community Is at the Heart of God's Plan

Community Expanded Through Creation

Genesis 1:26 "Then God said, `Let us make man in Our image, in Our likeness, . . . 27 So God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him.'" God makes man in His image which includes the ability to experience, and the need for, community.



Genesis 1:27b ". . . male and female He created them." It was not good for the man to be alone, so God made woman. Man was not in community with other humans. God wanted man to be in community with other people, not just with himself. Amazing!

Genesis 1:28a "God blessed them and said to them, `Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it.'"

God gave man the ability to create community!

Adam and Eve were created with the ability to create community through reproduction. God could have chosen to make clay dolls and breathe life into them. Instead, He chose to infuse into human design the ability to create community by reproduction, through having children.

As God dwells in community, He wants us to dwell in community too. He wants us to know the joy, as much as we are able, of entering into the creation of community. So we have the potential for community with God and community with people.

This idea of community is seen throughout Scripture

Abram, whose name means "exalted father," had his name changed by God to Abraham which means "father of nations".

God's people, Israel, was a nation made up of 12 tribes with clans and families. Community starts in the context of family.



Jesus was sent to the nation of Israel. He worked with a group of 70, but most closely with 12, which included an inner circle of 3.

The new community — the church on the day of Pentecost experienced Holy Spirit empowered fellowship (koinonia), where they held all things in common.

The perfect **community in eternity**— **Revelation 21:3-24** "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, `Now the dwelling of God is with men, and He will live with them. They will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'"

Brothers and sisters, community is not a whim of God! It is grounded in the very person of God, in Who He is, and in His essence. It is at the heart of His plan for the world and into eternity.

And for you and me, living in a little community is not an option, but an obligation. As believers we are a part of the larger family of God and a part of a local congregation. But we were created to live together in little communities, just as God does, just as the early church did. It is God's plan and design for us.

Can you see why it is essential that we put a great deal of effort into helping every member of this church become a part of a **LIFEgroup**?

As a member of a **LIFEgroup** put it:

"People may think they don't need involvement in a small group because they are already in groups, clubs, etc. They are wrong. The small group ministry is about becoming a family, being honest about your needs and weaknesses, and knowing that the other

members are sharing both your joys and sorrows. It is a connection with a group of people who come to love each other."

All of us are busy, but in spite of our schedules, we must find the time to meet with others and cultivate community if we are going to live as God desires. It is not a matter of deciding whether it fits in my schedule, but whether I am willing to obey what is clearly on the heart of God. If I am willing to obey God, then I will find a way to fit community time into my schedule. Time to interact, give and receive from others.

How am I obeying God's command to live in community? _____

What steps do you need to take to cultivate a richer "community lifestyle? _____

The small group ministry is about becoming a family, being honest about your needs and weaknesses, and knowing that the other members are sharing both your joys and sorrows.



Review



Pray and ask God to help you see what living in little communities can mean for God's kingdom. What practical lesson do you think He wants you to learn about authentic Christian community?

Pray regarding your role in the life of a small group. Every member is a minister, so what "ministry" do you bring to the church?

What describes your unique community at The **LIFEhouse** Church?

Why do you believe God brought this unique community of people together?

If you are not currently involved in a **LIFEgroup**, then begin now to ask God to direct you to one. If you know someone already in a group, ask if you can attend with them. If you need help in finding a group, don't hesitate to ask a leader or the pastor for assistance.

Jesus prayed for this very thing His last night here on earth: **John 17:11b-21** ". . . so that they may be one as We are one. . . 20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in Me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as You are in Me and I am in you. May they also be in Us so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.'

God the Father answered Jesus' prayer. The Holy Spirit came upon His church. They did what Jesus had done with them and started gathering in little groups all over Jerusalem. It was all by God's design. God created people to need one another and live in community, so that it produces a powerful witness of

God created us to need one another and live in community.

Jesus' presence and power.

Can you see the difference between living in community through small groups and only attending worship services as a spectator? In your own words, describe the difference between a church of participants, and a church of spectators:

We dream of becoming a church of little communities—

- ❖ Where peoples' needs are met
- ❖ Where everybody is cared for by somebody
- ❖ Where people connect with God in a safe place
- ❖ Where we utilize the spiritual gifts God has given us
- ❖ Where people can share unsafe things in a safe place

These little communities are places where people can be real. A place where people speak, out loud, the questions that often only rattle through their minds. A place where people can be who they really are, while becoming more like Christ.

A **LIFEgroup** member has said, "It is easy to slip in and out of church and never really be challenged in your faith. A small group is a non-threatening place where people can express their heart and others can minister to those expressed needs."

So what? How are you growing in your commitment to community?

Do you feel "safe" and able to be "real" in your small group? Why, or why not?



Jesus Established a **WEEK** Little Community

2

He Called the Twelve to be in a Relationship with Him, Part 1

An Ill-timed Faux Pas

A couple had joined a new church and were becoming a part of a **LIFEgroup** in the congregation. They were excited about their new membership and really eager to feel a part of their new church family.

The church, in an attempt to communicate their caring attitude towards new members, sent a letter that tried to communicate their genuine concern. It began: "Dear <insert name here>, We want you to know that we're concerned about you."

We can become highly organized and efficient in tracking new people in our church, sending mail, and making phone calls encouraging them to become active participants, but unless genuine relationships are cultivated and established, new people will never become connected, and they will feel like nothing more than a name on a computer list, or the recipient of a "<insert name here>" letter.

This is why we emphasize participation in a LIFEgroup.

Ultimately, unless a person establishes 6-8 relationships in the church in the first three months of involvement, research tells us that the person will most likely not remain in the church. This is why we emphasize participation in a **LIFEgroup**. The **LIFEgroup** is the best environment for establishing relationships that will help people connect and remain in the fellowship.

So our challenge is not that we come across in a friendly, caring way, so much as we are a friendly, caring body of believers.

As we work through this series on "*Little Communities in the Kingdom of God*," we are learning that the idea of living in community, in small groups, is God's design for the way He lives

and the way He desires His people to live.

By Way of Review

In the last lesson we saw that God can live any way He wants but He has chosen to live in a little community we call the Trinity— God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. God created Adam and Eve to live in a little community as husband and wife with the ability to create community. This is in the image of God.

Jesus lived in a little community in heaven with the Father and the Holy Spirit. When He came to earth, He was born into a little community of Joseph and Mary and later His brothers and sisters and other relatives. When He began His public ministry, He chose 12 of His followers to be with Him in community.



Becoming a church "of" *LIFEgroups* is not a new program or a reconfiguring of an old program, it is living as God calls us to live so that we can grow in being who He desires us to be. It is not a new church growth idea, but has been on God's heart from eternity past and has been displayed in the N.T. church 2,000 years ago as established by Jesus.

It is not a new church growth idea, but almost 2,000 years old and established by Jesus.

Read Mark 3:13-19

Joining Jesus' group meant being *with* Him!

Verse 14 says "**He appointed twelve . . . that they might be with Him.**" Jesus did not call them to participate in a program, He called them to be *with* Him. He said, "Come be *with* me." He called them into a relationship with Himself. He made it clear that before these men were to preach or to cast out demons, they were to be with Him.

The Gospels Show Us That Jesus and the Disciples did Everything Together

- ❖ They went on retreats to the mountains for rest
- ❖ They walked together on lonely roads

- ❖ They visited with friends together
- ❖ They sailed and fished together on the Sea of Galilee
- ❖ They prayed together in the deserts and mountains
- ❖ They worshipped together in the synagogues and in the Temple
- ❖ They talked with one another constantly
- ❖ They were there when He fed the 5,000
- ❖ They saw Him raise Lazarus from the dead
- ❖ They heard Him say, "Peace, be still!" and saw the storm, which threatened their lives, go completely calm
- ❖ They were there when He healed the lame and the blind
- ❖ They heard His warnings against becoming hypocrites like the Pharisees
- ❖ They saw the look on His face when Mary and His brothers and sisters came to take Him away because they thought He had lost His mind.
- ❖ They saw tears run down His face at a friend's tomb
- ❖ They heard His prayers of agony in the garden on the night of His betrayal

...as they lived together with Him, they learned His values.

Jesus did all of these things with them just to get time together. And as they lived together with Him, they learned His values. Values are more easily caught than taught.

What have you learned about the importance of spending time **with** individuals? _____

Look back through today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more ideas He wants you to understand, learn or apply to your life.

Why do you think Jesus chose to spend time "with" the disciples rather than simply set up a school, manuals and curriculum? _____



DAY 2

"He Called the Twelve to be in a Relationship with Him" Part 2

Jesus Ministered to the Multitudes, but He Lived with His Small Group

Jesus taught, healed and fed the multitudes. He did not ignore or snub them. He felt so compassionately for the people that the word used to describe his heart, was that which affected him physically. Like the emotion of a child who is weeping to the point of heaving, and stuttering for breath. Jesus was



grieved over Jerusalem because they were "harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36) At one point, the multitudes wanted to take Jesus and make Him their King. He could have lived in a palace and been surrounded by servants, administrators, and the thousands who would come to hear Him teach. He could have held state dinners with the leaders of the world and been sought out by the wise men of His day.

But even though He had a powerful and popular public ministry, Jesus chose to live in a little community with twelve common men and to spend most of His time with them. This was not just something Jesus *did*, this was the way He *chose to live*. **LIFEgroups** should not be something we go to *do* on one evening a week, they should be the way we *choose to live*.

Have you ever wished you could have been a part of Jesus' band of twelve? I sure have! Many times over the past 20 years I have wished I could have been a part of His small group— to hear Him teach, to see Him heal the sick, the blind, the lame, to raise the dead, to perform miracles, etc.

A Ride in a Time Machine

Wouldn't it be a kick to climb into a time machine, set the date

meter for early in the first century and infiltrate Jesus' group.

What would you give to have the chance to observe the disciples firsthand in the fishing boat during the storm on the Sea of Galilee? Wouldn't you love to see the actual expressions on their faces when they first saw Jesus walking on the water, and then hearing Him say, "Come out on the water and walk with Me."

Have you ever wondered what it would have been like to travel with the twelve? _____

Which of the twelve was most like you? _____

Matthew 4:19,
"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."

What kinds of things would you have liked to hear Him say or see Him do? _____

John 12:26

"Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. My Father will honor the one who serves me."

Do you think any of these things are possible today?

Why or why not? _____

Look back through today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more ideas He wants you to understand, learn or apply to your life.

What Scripture or statement spoke to you today?

How can you apply this Scripture or thought to your life? _____

DAY 3

What Are These Little Communities?

Our Little Communities are a Place to BE WITH Jesus Together

We join together so we can be with Jesus in His Word, through prayer, worship and the exercise of spiritual gifts. It is a place where we not only talk *about* Jesus, we talk *with or to* Him because He is with us. We not only sing *about* Jesus and what He means to us, we *truly worship* Him because He is with us. He is really with us, in Spirit and in power.

We meet and discuss the Word we were taught on Sunday. What does this mean? We seek to answer questions that are brought up. If we can't answer them, we pray and ask the Lord to reveal what He means by a specific passage of Scripture. One **LIFEgroup** member put it like this:

"The group helps me get my mind thinking when discussing (various) subjects. Everyone's different perspectives helps clarify things."

Then we get to the "What do we do with this information?" We do not need more heavy and deep preaching. We need application and obedience.

John 13:17 "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them." We are not just looking for

more spiritual knowledge alone. 1 Corinthians 8:1b " Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up."



One of our men, who has been involved since we began the first **LIFEgroups**, has said,

"From the first meeting I realized God's power to work in our group. I saw Him take charge of my limited abilities and use them to help His ministry grow. Peoples' lives were changed, the groups flourished, peoples' convictions changed, men stepped forward to lead. . . God is meeting with us and changing us while He is there."

Our Little Communities are a Place to BE the Body of Christ

As we meet together, we experience Jesus ministering through His Body to His Body. In other words, we see believers using their spiritual gifts to minister to the needs of others in the body.

I love playing tennis. However, I have an older brother who has been the club champion and my nemesis since we were children. He is one of few people I have been able to conquer on the tennis court. I have had this dream of what it would be like to take tennis professional, Andre Agassi, and stuff him, his skill and talent into my body for a day. I would give my older brother a call, and ask to play a game of tennis for fun. I would suggest that it would be the match for all time, and whoever won would become the perennial grand champion for the next millennia.

I would then proceed to pound my brother into submission on the tennis court using Andre Agassi's ability. Fun dream huh?

The Christian life is very similar to this dream of mine, but far more realistic. The Christian life is where I ask Jesus to come into my life and live life through my body, my personality, and unique wiring. The Christian life is an impossible life to live in the flesh. I need Jesus to take up residence and empower me to be who He created me to be. We see this truth reflected in

"And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever - the Spirit of truth."

— John
14:16, 17a

Luke 9:23 "Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." NIV

When I take up my cross, and deny myself, Jesus is able to live His life through me. This is when I truly come alive to the things of God and receive the power to live the victorious, abundant Christian life.

Right before Jesus was crucified, He told His disciples that He would not leave them alone. He would send another Comforter, just like Himself, the Holy Spirit. He sent the Spirit to live *with us*, to be *with us* forever. He then calls us the Body of Christ.

Together we are His body on earth. We are Jesus' visible, tangible body to one another— serving, speaking, helping, encouraging, leading, being real, really knowing one another, so that we can minister to one another.

None of us are complete without each other. Together we meet with Jesus and, as He lives in us, we are His Body. Those hands that you hold as you pray together are the hands of Jesus as you are the Body of Christ. Those gentle and truthful words, spoken through someone or in a note, are the healing and encouraging words of Jesus through His Body on earth. This is the Holy Spirit being Jesus through us to one another.

Do you see why we are called to live in little communities? _____

Explain _____

Are you being “Jesus” to the people in your little community? _____

Explain: _____

Give an example of a time in a **LIFEgroup** when a person or persons became Jesus to you. _____

Are you helping your little community become like this? _____
If so how? If not, what could you do to help your group become the
Body of Christ to each other? _____



Joining Jesus' Group Meant Being Known by Him

What Were Jesus' Twelve Disciples Like?

Robert Coleman describes the 12 disciples like this:

"They were impulsive, temperamental, easily offended, and had all the prejudices of their environment. . . . Not the kind of group one would expect to win the world for Christ. Yet Jesus saw in these simple men the potential of leadership for the Kingdom. They were indeed 'unlearned and ignorant' according to the world's standard (Acts 4:13), but they were teachable. Though often mistaken in their judgments and slow to comprehend spiritual things, they were honest men, willing to confess their need. Their mannerisms may have been awkward and their abilities limited, but with the exception of the traitor, their hearts were big. What is perhaps most significant about them was their sincere yearning for God and the realities of His life. . . . Such men, pliable in the hands of the Master, could be molded into a new image."
(The Master Plan of Evangelism, Robert Coleman, pages 23, 24)

**Jesus' Style of Leadership Allowed
for Being Who You Really Were**



One of the things that stands out in my mind, as I read the Gospels, is the way the disciples of Jesus lived without putting on false fronts of religiosity. They were free to be who they were because Jesus wanted them to be real. He did not try to get them to cover up or conform their behavior. He dealt with their hearts. But being with Him also showed the contrast between His life and theirs.

The computer term WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) describes the disciples. They would just be who they naturally were and often something ugly and sinful came out. Jesus would hold up the mirror of God's values and let them see themselves as they really were.

The Pharisees and their followers were totally different. They emphasized outward conformity to the law and so proper performance was the standard for spiritual life. As a result, Jesus said that when they won a convert to Judaism, they made him twice as much a son of hell as they were (Matthew 23:15).

On Jesus' last night together with His disciples, we see them not as saints with halos on their heads, but as men who were arguing about who was considered to be the greatest. Peter showed his naive bravado by boasting that he would never desert the Lord even if all the others did. But the disciples were there with Jesus because they loved Him and had left everything to follow Him.

Jesus took bread and broke it, and, in my mind, I see Him making eye contact with each one. As He does, that one knows that Jesus knows him.

- ❖ Peter— "You are not the rock you like to think of yourself as being, but you are a little stone. Yet, how zealous and eager you are to lead for Me."
- ❖ John— "The Son of Thunder who wanted to call down fire from heaven and kill a Samaritan village just for rejecting Me. What intense love you have for Me and will have for others."

**John 10:14, 15,
27**

"I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me— just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

❖ James— "You schemer you— using your mother and brother to try to get Me to give you one of the two most prominent spots in the Kingdom. But you walked away from your earthly business and its success and prestige to be with Me."

And on and on with each disciple. He knew them each one and He loved them.

When He broke the bread and said, "This is My Body which is given for you." He was saying, "I know you. I love you. And so, I must die for you." How special to be in Jesus' group! And how special to be known, not only by Jesus, but by members of His body, members of a small group where you can be known for who you really are, and still be loved and forgiven.

If Jesus were breaking bread with you right now, might he be thinking about your life as he hands you the bread? _____

Prayerfully ask God to give you His perspective on your life. How does God desire to express His love for you in your weakness and shortcomings? _____

Is this a difficult assignment for you? _____

Why do you think it is important to know that God accepts us just as we are, but loves us too much to allow us to stay as we are? _____



Relationships: Essential for Effective Ministry

The Institute For American Church Growth asked over 10,000 people this question: "What was responsible for your coming to Christ and this church?"

- ❖ I had a special need - 3%
- ❖ I just walked in - 3%
- ❖ I liked the minister - 6%
- ❖ I visited there - 1%
- ❖ I liked the Bible classes - 5%
- ❖ I attended a gospel meeting - 0.5%
- ❖ I liked the programs - 3%
- ❖ A friend or relative invited me - 79%

A trusted friend is the most effective avenue for people to connect with the church. Do you see the value of every Christian building a relationship with someone who has yet to know Christ?

We see in the early church how they ministered through their natural relationships and contacts to spread the gospel. The Bible uses the Greek word "oikos" which means "household" in the sense, not only of those in a person's family, but also those in close relationship. The gospel spread quickly as people communicated the good news to those within their established "oikos", or sphere of influence.

Jesus set the pace for us as He modeled the value of building strong relationships with a few for the greatest impact.

Robert Coleman in his classic work, *The Master Plan of Evangelism* captures the genius of Jesus strategy...

"Why did Jesus deliberately concentrate His life upon comparatively so few people? Had He not come to save the world?... The answer to this question focuses at once at the real purpose of His plan for evangelism. Jesus was not trying to

impress the crowd, but to usher in a Kingdom. This meant that He needed men who could lead the multitudes. What good would it have been for His ultimate objective to arouse the masses to follow Him if these people had no subsequent supervision nor instruction in the way" "Here is where we must begin just like Jesus. It will be low, tedious, painful and probably unnoticed by men at first, but the end result will be glorious, even if we don't live to see it. Seen this way, though, it becomes a big decision in the ministry. One must decide where he wants his ministry to count - - in the momentary applause of popular recognition or in the reproduction of his life in a few chosen men who will carry on his work after he has gone." (The Master Plan of Evangelism by Robert Coleman, page 31, 36-37)

1 Timothy 1:5

"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."

Who was instrumental in assisting you in your spiritual growth? How did God use them to move you forward in your spiritual maturity? _____

Galatians 6:2

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

Look over the last two weeks of devotional material, and answer the following questions:

1) How is "community" reflected in God's very being? _____

2) How is "community" central to God's plan for man? _____

3) How did Jesus establish a little community on earth? What was the purpose of Jesus' small group?

4) How are you obeying God and following His heart for living in community with other believers?

The New Community That God Established

WEEK

3



DAY 1

"Ecclesia"— the Church

What is the Church?

"Ecclesia" is the New Testament word for "the church." We are the people of God, a holy nation. A chorus we sing, entitled "People of the Lord," puts it like this:

People of the Lord

There is one body; we have one Lord.
United in the Spirit, we are going forth,
With His praise on our lips,

And a sword in our hands,
We are marching on with power,
As we possess this land.

We are the people of the Lord.
We're a holy nation,
A chosen generation,
Called to show forth His praise.
We are the people of the Lord,
We're a holy nation, believers in Jesus,
Lifting up our voices to the Lord.

The Lord is moving with power in His church all across the world right now. Just a few examples of this are:

- ❖ There is a powerful movement in prayer— God calling us back to full dependence upon Him and Him alone. People are wanting to see His power freed to work as it did in the New Testament church.
- ❖ There is a powerful men's movement, at least in the United States and Canada. God is calling men to strong and humble Christ-like leadership in the home, the church and the family.
- ❖ An example would be Promise Keepers, which in 1995 had over 700,000 men in attendance at 13 conferences around the nation. These men are not just getting whooped up to make more promises. They are being challenged to be Promise Keepers.
- ❖ There is a powerful movement, a revolution, concerning how churches live as the Body of Christ. It is the small group, or "little community" movement. It is about *being* the church not just running around *doing* church by doing church things.

Ecclesiastes. 11:6

"Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let not your hands
be idle, for you do not know
which will succeed, whether this
or that, or whether both will do
equally well."

A review

We have seen that God lives in a little _____. He always has. It is called the _____.

Jesus established a little community of _____ common men and spent most of His 3 1/2 years of ministry living together _____ them.

On the Day of Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled His promise to come and live in the midst of His people by sending the _____ in power. The men began speaking about the wonders of God in languages they had never studied. Peter preached and at the end the people asked, "What shall we do?" Peter said, "Repent and be baptized." And on that first day, the church expanded from a band of 12 apostles and 120 faithful followers in the Upper Room to an instant mega church of 3,000. WOW!!!



Now let's take a trip back to first century Jerusalem. Let's say you are now Peter, the leader of the early church. You remember that Jesus charged you with the responsibility of His church, when you had that conversation with Him on the beach and He said, "Feed My sheep. Feed My lambs. Take care of My sheep." You have just instantaneously become responsible for 3,000 new believers. What are you going to do with them?

How do 12 apostles shepherd, spiritually feed and care for 3,000? By themselves they can't! If you were Peter, you might have said, "Lord, You only had to care for 12 of us. Sure you trained and led 70 or so others on evangelistic missions trips. But you really only cared for 12. I'm looking at 3,000 people. What am I supposed to do with them?"

What would you do if you were responsible for 3,000 new believers?

The key is to care for them as Jesus cared for the 12. He divided them up into 3 little groups of 4. So Peter carried on this idea and these 3,000 people all became part of little house churches.

(Remember they did not have church buildings in which to meet.) Peter did not lose his focus on God's call to be a man of prayer and a man of the word. He did not let the stress of managing all the new people rob him of his connection with God.

Look back through today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more ideas He wants you to understand, learn or apply to your life.

What Scripture or statement spoke to you today?

What do you see the Lord doing today? _____



The Early Church Lived in Little Communities, Part 1

Read Acts 2:42-47

Read Acts 5:42

Notice in verse 46 it says "**everyday they continued to meet together in the temple courts.**" They met *en masse*— in large groups. But it goes on to say, "**they broke bread in their homes. . .**" They met in home groups! We see the same thing in Acts 5:42, "**Day after day in the temple courts and from house to house. . .**" The early church not only met together in large groups in the temple courts, they also met together in small groups in homes.

1 Corinthians 16:19 " . . . Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets at their house."

Colossians 4:15 "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house."

As we have moved through the Bible these past three weeks, we continue to see that *LIFEgroups* are God's design for His church.

LIFEgroups are not a program, they are the way God has created us to live as His people! We, therefore, need to ask ourselves the question:



How do I View *LIFEgroups*?

If I see *LIFEgroups* as one of many programs in the church, I can view my involvement in a *LIFEgroup* as optional. After all, there is no way you can be involved in every program a church has. You need to choose which you prefer. However, if I understand that *LIFEgroups* are the way God created us to live as His church, then I know that it is a necessity if I am to be a functional member of the Body of Christ.

Defining a *LIFEgroup* Based Church

These *LIFEgroups* are the building blocks for what we call "basic Christian community". As people experience the transforming power of Jesus' presence in these *LIFEgroups*, they will learn to be disciples of Christ, and their service within the church becomes an outflow of the life of Jesus within.

"basic
Christian
community"

Most of us understand the need for a personal relationship with Jesus Christ and the need to walk with Him daily. But, it tends to be more of a struggle to understand that we are to live with Him as well as in little communities. We are to be a community that is living and breathing with vitality, life and power, with Jesus Himself as the Center of not only our personal lives but our *LIFEgroup* life as well.

As we meet in our *LIFEgroups*, we are not at the center of our group life, nor should the leader be. Jesus is in our midst as we gather— He is at the center. He is the One who fills the individual parts of His Body, breathes the life of the Holy Spirit into them and unites them as a living, caring, visible, tangible Body. His Body comes alive with power, purpose and the presence of



the Lord Jesus Christ Himself.

The dimension of "caring " and "feeding" cannot happen in large group gatherings. We are too big to know each other. Not everyone can participate. The majority of members are spectators. Neither can this "caring" and "feeding" happen effectively in the large church context. The larger church must get "smaller" as it gets "larger".

"For example, the Yoido Full Gospel Church, in Seoul, Korea, had more than 650,000 participants at the end of the 1980s, up from 100,000 a decade earlier. Yet as the size increased, the "care delivery system" became smaller and more personalized. From most members' perspective, their church fellowship rarely appears to be larger than ten or twenty people. These are called home cells and are led by some 55,000 **LIFEgroup** leaders. This system enables each of the 650,000 individuals to receive individual spiritual attention." (Prepare Your Church for the Future, by Carl George, Revell, 1992, Page 22)

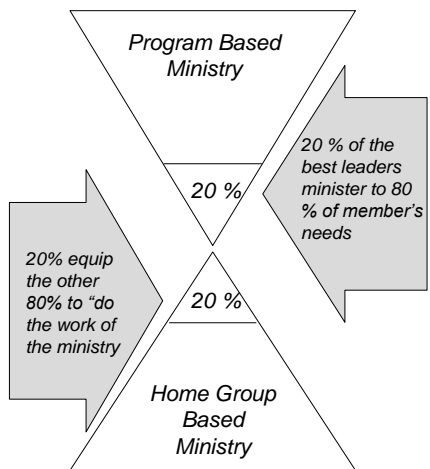
55,000
LIFEgroup
Leaders?

Defining a Program based church

Program based churches seek to come up with programs to attract and then to keep people in the church. Bigger, better, and more effective programs must constantly be developed, promoted and implemented to grow and maintain the members.

Program based churches slowly develop two types of people

The first type are the leaders or what I call the "survival of the fittest" types (those who become leaders and cannot understand why the others won't get with it.) They usually make up about 20% of a program based church's membership.



The second group are the observers, who do not contribute in a vital way to the life of the church. They come, enjoy and receive but are not active participants or contributors. They usually make up about 80% of the program based church's membership. They are not like the "fittest" in personality or spiritual gifts and so they look at the leaders and say to themselves, "I could never do that!" Or they observe people burning out all around them and don't want to become one of them.

So we have 20% of the congregation supporting or holding up the other 80%. It is like a triangle with its peak pointing downwards, with the leaders at the point, supporting and maintaining the programs that service the 80%.

Chuck Olsen, an authority on small groups and church leadership traveled extensively among churches in the 1960s and '70s. He observed more than 1,000 congregations in the major denominations and concluded: "No matter how large a congregation becomes, the leadership base stays at approximately sixty-five or seventy people." When churches are running programs rather than ministering through *LIFEgroups*, there are only a set number of leadership rolls to fill. There is need for only one preacher, one worship leader, one organist etc. no matter how large the church becomes.

People over Programs

Our purpose is to take the un-churched and grow them into fully devoted followers of Christ. As we devote our attention to carrying out Jesus' command to "make disciples of all nations" ministry will flow out of the lives of the believers.

"Is my job to build a strong ministry, or is it to build strong people who minister?" We believe that if we build strong people who minister, then our ministries will be strong. But if we strive to build strong ministries (programs), we may not end up building strong people." (Let Go: A fresh Look at Effective Leadership in Ministry, by John Westfall and Bobbie Reed). Think through your experience as a church member. Based upon our descriptions in today's lesson, would you say you have tended to be part of the 20%

who are leaders or the 80% who are observers?

Why would you say this?

Do you think this is how Christ intended for His Body to function?

Explain your answer. _____

What is the difference between a "strong ministry" and "strong people" who minister? _____



The Early Church Lived in Little Communities, Part 2

What is the Real Problem with the 20%/80% Triangle?

There are those who think the problem is with the 80% who just won't "get with it." They try to identify them, to motivate them, even at times, to make them feel guilty in an attempt to get them to be a part of the 20%. Then when that does not work, and it does not:

The church goes through periods of consolidation of membership because the program based church can never minister to everyone. It cannot launch enough programs to hold everyone. And because it is built on programs that meet needs, it breeds a consumer mentality that cannot be fully satisfied.

The church also goes through periods of consolidation or reduction

of church programs. This happens because the pastoral staff, the 20% who are leaders, and many around them are at the point of program burnout and cannot or should not take on any more.

The 20% are at the bottom of the triangle struggling to maintain ministries for the 80%. And, as some of the 80% move into the 20% leadership group, it never gets much larger because invariably some in the 20% group jump out, fall out or are carried out in body bags because they are burned out from carrying the program load. These folks end up either:

- ❖ guilty — "How could I have flunked out like this?" or
- ❖ angry— "I thought they cared. I get tired and have to drop out and they say, 'Let us know when you get better.'"

Signs of "Program Burnout" at the Individual Level



1. Love for people starts to die and people become a burden. People are seen as a "drain"— someone else who is going to stick a plug in me and drain off what little I have left.
2. I begin to withdraw physically, emotionally and spiritually.
3. I develop unexplained anger, frustration, floating anxiety or guilt. Thoughts enter my mind like:
 - ❖ I am "driven" by the needs of people and the "program", rather than God's call on my life.
 - ❖ "They only call when they need someone to fill a slot."
 - ❖ "I don't see anywhere I fit."
 - ❖ "I could disappear and no one would even know. And they wouldn't care either."
 - ❖ Ministry becomes a "me against them" mindset.
 - ❖ "I don't need anyone else, I will just do it myself"
4. Activity increases, but productivity drops over time.
5. Unwillingness to risk and dream
6. Living with a "survival, or maintenance" mindset.



Signs of "Program Burnout" at the all Church Level

1. The church becomes involved in intense and continuous recruiting to support the various programs. Often the results are insufficient which leads to increasingly intense and frustrating recruiting.
2. Bleary-eyed leaders do not enjoy their service unto the Lord but endure the burden of it all. They slowly lose their desire to serve the Lord and His church.
3. Church members are on their guard when they go to Sunday school or to a **LIFEgroup** wondering if they are going to get recruited for something else.

There will always be a certain degree of recruiting because the church is primarily a volunteer organization. What we are describing above is "program burnout."

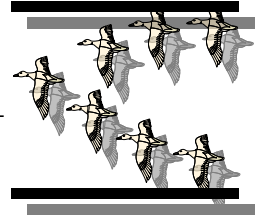
By flying in a v-formation, Canadian Geese fly with 70% greater efficiency as they share the lead and fly in each other's draft.

Have you ever found yourself in one or more of

the program burnout situations described above,

either in this church or somewhere else? _____

Describe your experience _____



How did you feel when you were going through this experience?__

How has or did that experience affect your willingness to serve in

the future? _____

Look back through today's lesson. Pray and ask God to identify one or more ideas He wants you to understand, learn or apply to your life.



The Early Church Lived in Little Communities, Part 3

Getting back to the question of "what is the real problem of leadership in the church?" The problem is not with the 20% — we do not need to get them firmer or stronger. And the problem is not with the 80% — we do not need them to "just get with it."

The Problem is with the **METHOD** of Doing Church

When we look at the New Testament, we do not find a program based church. That is, the basic building blocks of the church are not programs— they are little communities, the Body of Christ meeting together. The focus of the leadership and the people is not on creating programs for the multitudes, but on living together as God's people, being God's people gathering in *LIFEgroups* to meet with Jesus, Who lives in our midst.

When we look at the New Testament, we do not find a program based church.

When needs arise, they are met primarily at the *LIFEgroup* level. Occasionally needs are met through creating a ministry that supports the *LIFEgroups*. An example would be Acts 6 where the deacons were appointed to help with food distribution to the widows. Up to this point it had not been handled very well because the apostles, who were the leaders of the church, were trying to do it

all.

When the needs of the widows were not being met, seven spiritual leaders were selected to meet the need. Some other people in the church obviously helped the seven, so the small groups could continue to be the focus of the apostles' ministry.

The Early Church also Gathered in a Large Group

In Acts 2:46 we read, "**Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.**" And in Acts 5:42 "**Day after day, in the temple courts, . . . they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.**"

Not only did the church meet house to house in small groups, but it gathered as a whole in a large group. Acts 5:12 tells us they met in Solomon's Colonnade, which was a long porch covering the length of the east side of the temple grounds.

Not only did the church meet house to house in small groups, but it gathered as a whole in a large group.

This sometimes brings up a question, "When were they *`at church'* or *`in church'*?"

When they were in the temple courts, gathered as thousands, listening to the top leaders and teachers? or

When they were in the homes with a leader designated by the apostles?

Let's look at this another way. I am not playing word games or making unimportant distinctions here. When are you "at church" or "in church"?

The answer is, **we are the church!** When we gather in thousands, we are the church. When we gather in *LIFEgroups* with Jesus in our midst, we are, just as much, the church. It is not either - or, it is both - and. Both are indispensable—the little community and the large group gathering together. We are to gather as the Home Church and as the Whole Church.

It was in the little communities that the early Christians met to discuss and apply the teaching they heard from the apostles in the

large group meeting. It was also there that they were able to love, care for and pray for one another, as Jesus' Body.

Then, each little community or home church came to the Whole Church gathering at the temple, overflowing from the closeness of living together with Jesus. There they exploded in celebration, praise and worship together, adoring and giving thanks to the Triune God of the Universe, Who has come and continues to live among us.

overflowing from the closeness of living together with Jesus.

In essence, *LIFEgroups* are about how the Lord Jesus Christ has chosen to reveal Himself in His church. The incarnate presence of Christ is in our midst and we desire to meet with Him, and experience his power and purpose for life.

The house church is the basic building block for the Whole Church and the Whole Church nurtures and encourages the house church. Both are necessary— neither are optional.

Are you able to see the necessity for both large group meetings (worship services for example) and small home groups within the church? _____

From what you have learned thus far in this study, why do we meet together in *LIFEgroups*? _____

Why do we meet together in large groups? _____

Why did we say both are necessary and neither was optional? _____

If you are still not involved in a **LIFEgroup**, do you now see the necessity for being in one? _____ Why? _____



Applying What You Have Learned

We are seeking to learn and follow the New Testament pattern for being the church. The Bible says that we are the Bride of Christ. We want to be the kind of Bride He died to marry.

The vast majority of this church is involved in **LIFEgroup** life. We are learning as we go. We are growing in our understanding of what it means to live with Christ in our midst and to be the Body of Christ. And that's OK. Ephesians 5: 8b, 10 says, "**Walk as children of light . . . and find out what pleases the Lord.**" Are you seeking the Lord as to your life schedule and how you are living as a believer?

1 Corinthians 12:18-19

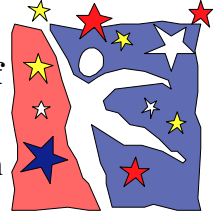
"But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be."

What People of the Church are Saying

We have surveyed a number of people who are members of **LIFEgroups**, in regard to "life" in the **LIFEgroups**. The following are some of their

responses:

How Have You Experienced the Presence of Christ in LIFEgroup Ministry?



Group member: "I feel Christ truly touches lives in an intimate way in *LIFEgroups*.."

Group leader: "When folks have come with heavy issues or questions and the group has responded with sensitivity and words that were obviously beyond the norm for us."

Group leader: "Mostly I have experienced Jesus' presence by the way people have become servants of each other like in Acts 2:42-47."

Coach: "God has changed people, situations and problems into tremendous victory. Things only God could do— healing broken relationships, new life in Christ!"

Coach: "The presence of Christ has been manifested dramatically in worship through singing and prayer. . . I have also experienced the presence of Christ through seeing lives change due to the power of prayer."

Group leader: "Myself and others opening our lives to each other as family as never before.. There have been encouraging times, weeping, and times of confession that have obviously been Jesus' presence via the Holy Spirit. As we love each other and touch each other's lives, God puts skin on that we can touch and see through each other."

Why do You Feel People Should be Involved in LIFEgroup Ministry?

Group member: "The most obvious reason to me is having close relationships with others— sharing and bearing one another's burdens, seeing Christ work in other's lives which gives us joy and hope and assures us that the Lord is with us. *LIFEgroups* also allow individual gifts to surface as brothers and sisters minister through them."

Coach: "Once you have tasted the goodness of God, there is a desire to know Him better."



Group leader: "**LIFEgroups** allow people a regular, familiar place to go and actually experience God's love and acceptance as family.

Over time, you can see trust and caring grow between group members and ultimately lifelong friendships.

Coach: "Because God intends for us to live in community. For many years I had heard people say that the Body of Christ is family. . . but I never felt it to be until **LIFEgroups**. I feel connected. I know that if I had a need, someone could help me. This is tremendous!"

Group member: Being in a **LIFEgroup** I've learned to worship freely. I am a new Christian and my leaders have been very patient and kind as I grow in my walk with Christ. The faith of the more mature Christians has helped me grow in my faith."

Coach: "Fellowship, support, serving, worship, teaching, growing, belonging. . . The **LIFEgroup** is the best place to be close enough to others to truly experience the meaning of the Body of Christ."

Leader: "It is the only way to have involvement in each others lives. We need each other."

Leader: "I think that, with extended family being so physically separated, the group becomes the extended family. As the **LIFEgroup** actively acts as family, Christ's fullness is seen and is a witness to the community of Christ's love being real."

Coach: "Being involved in **LIFEgroup** ministry enables people to feel part of a group. It gives them the opportunity to share difficulties and praises that otherwise probably wouldn't be shared in larger groups. It gives people a chance to get into others lives and minister as well as be ministered to."

Coach: "It is the place where relationships are made with other believers and then, together, with Jesus Christ. It is the place where you can meet Jesus and practice being a servant. In a **LIFEgroup**

you can express care and become a giver. People should be involved in **LIFEgroup** ministry because that is where they will see what grace is all about and find hope."

Leader: "I think there is comfort in knowing that you have a place to go when you need to be `loved or helped."

If you are currently involved in a **LIFEgroup**, answer the following questions:

How have you experienced the presence of Christ in **LIFEgroup** ministry? _____

Why do you feel people should be involved in **LIFEgroup** ministry? _____

Won't you consider sending a letter to your Pastor, expressing the benefits you have received by being involved in a **LIFEgroup**? Not only will it encourage your Pastor, but it will also give the Pastor the data needed in helping other understand why they should join a **LIFEgroup**.



Notes

Notes



Pastor Stan Lubeck
The **LIFEhouse** Church
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