

Life Groups

Part 2: Homes, house-to-house and households

The audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/homes-house-to-house-and-households/>

In Part 1 of this series on Life Groups, we looked at Acts 1 & 2 and examined how the early church started and how they met. Acts 2:42 and vs 43 shows us that they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching (the Word), the breaking of bread, the fellowship and prayers. Verse 43 shows us that they met both in large corporate meetings (at the Jewish Temple) and in their homes. It even says they did this day by day!

Now we'll look at the emphasis the Scriptures place on homes, starting from the ministry of Jesus to the life of the early church, including the letters, which give us more clues to God's heart for church life.

1) In Jesus' day, a lot of ministry took place in homes

In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them, and they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. He lived this out in his own ministry. The Gospel always goes out in ever-increasing circles. You see this from the scriptures.

Let's examine how much of Jesus' ministry occurred in homes and came out of homes. Unlike what we might expect today, or what they might have expected then, Jesus didn't occupy some chief place in society. He didn't minister out of some school of philosophy or anything like that. No, instead he ministered and taught in normal, ordinary, every-day homes.

The Gospel must invade our homes and then must flow out of our homes. Our homes ought to be a place where the healing of God flows.

□ Matthew 8: 14 – 17

14 And when Jesus entered **Peter's house**, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever. 15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. 16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

□ Luke 5: 31 – 32 (also see Matthew 9: 10 – 13)

"31 And Jesus answered them, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

This profound declaration of the Gospel comes out of a home (Levi's home). Right here, in a home, all sorts of things are happening – Jesus is talking about the Gospel; He is being criticised; He rebukes the Pharisees. These very important moments didn't occur at some important place somewhere.

Jesus' declaration of the sick needing salvation is what our homes should stand for – a place where the lost are welcome, where people can get saved. We can invite any of our friends to our home as, after all, the Gospel is not for the righteous but the unrighteous. Effectively, our homes are a venue for the Gospel.

▯ **Mark 2:1**

And when [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was **at home**.

The rest of this passage tells the story of the paralytic who was healed after being lowered down from the roof by his friends because there wasn't even space by the door. That all happened in Jesus' own home, who was preaching the word. Note that he didn't complain that they had opened up his roof to lower down their friend!

▯ **Mark 3:20 – 21**

Then he went home, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

Talk about how the Gospel invades! They couldn't even eat because the crowd! His family even said He was out of his mind.

Jesus' ministry was from the inside out. If the Gospel isn't working at home, will it work outside the home? Jesus took the Gospel home – he allowed it to mess up his own home, to turn it upside down.

- ▯ A lot of Jesus' discipling happened in homes. **Mark 9: 33-37** offers us an example (this is possibly Jesus' own home being referred to):

33 And they came to Capernaum. And **when he was in the house** he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, “If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all.” 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 “Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me.”

- ▯ **Luke 10:38-42** – He taught in Mary and Martha's house.

▮ **Luke 19:1-10**

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for **I must stay at your house today.**" 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house,** since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Salvation came to a house, and that mattered to Jesus, and he declared this salvation out of a house. That declaration can be made in our homes too. Our home is a rescue station where people can get healed. Yes, it is a sanctuary as well for us and there are times when it's good to just unwind. But the fact is that it must be an outlet for the Gospel.

▮ **Matt 26:18**

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover **at your house** with my disciples. '"

The Passover was a profound moment in time that we still celebrate today. And it all happened in a home.

▮ **Luke 7:36**

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's **house** and reclined at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment, 38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Our homes ought to be filled with an aroma of worship. This is a beautiful picture of what a home can be.

2) The first church met in the temple and in homes

▮ **Acts 2:1-3 1**

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled **the entire house** where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Lord determined that the Church would be born with the power of the Spirit in a home. This meeting in homes continued as a component of the early church's life, as the scriptures below show. You didn't have to tell them to meet in homes, they knew that that's where Christianity is lived out.

▮ **Acts 2:46-47 46**

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread **in their homes**, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

▮ **Acts 5:42**

And every day, in the temple and from **house to house**, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

▮ **Acts 8:1b-3**

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering **house after house**, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

▮ **Acts 12:12-17**

When Peter was set free by the angels, he went to Mary's house, the mother of John-Mark, where there was a prayer meeting being held for his release from prison! Our homes can be used for prayer.

▮ **Acts 20:17-21**

17 Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. 18 And when they came to him, he said to them:

"You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and **teaching you in public and from house to house**, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you can see, Paul' ministry – despite being a prominent leader – included preaching from house to house. Discipling happens in homes. If you read through the book of Acts with this in mind you'll start to pick up the heart of it.

3) Households were impacted with the Gospel

(Some went on to become churches)

▮ **Acts 10:17-48**

Cornelius' household in Caesarea

▮ **Acts 16:11-15**

Lydia's household in Philippi

▯ **Acts 16:25-34**

The Philippian jailer

This last scripture is a good one to read. God is very interested in saving households, not just individuals. After you're saved the next thing on God's agenda is to see your household saved. This is how we should be praying. And not just for our parents or our kids but for our aunts and uncles and all the rest.

▯ **Acts 18:1-11**

After Paul is kicked out of the synagogue in Corinth, he moves to Titius Justus' house next door and ministers from his house. There the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and his household are saved! So he was kicked out of the synagogue only to have the ruler of the synagogue saved in a house next door.

These scriptures challenge the way some of us think of Life Groups. This isn't a time to play Scrabble or Chess! God is interested in this.

3b) Churches in homes

At the end of many of Paul's letters, you'll see he greets churches that meet in homes. For example:

▯ **Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19**

Priscilla and Aquila's home

▯ **Col 4:15**

Nympha of Laodicea's home

▯ **Philemon 2**

Philemon from Lycos Valley's home

It seems churches may have been planted in houses and moved elsewhere as they got bigger. Some of them had big mansions so they could accommodate that. The point is that there's a strong theme surrounding the involvement of homes with the Gospel.

The Principles

Taking all the above into account, let's apply this to today. So, why do we meet the way we do (in homes and in big corporate gatherings)?

1. We emulate Jesus

▯ We see how Jesus ministered above. But Jesus also calls his house a "house of prayer for all nations" (Mark 11:17).

Life Groups aren't a program that we add on to our Christianity but are rather the way in which we live it out. We don't need amazing facilities – although we do thank God for our facility. Our primary way of meeting is in homes.

- Jesus also spoke about how Zeal for His Father's house consumed Him (John 2:17). A home is not just a place but it's a family. When we meet in a home that family is making a statement about who they serve, who their God is, the Gospel they believe and the Jesus they trust.
- Jesus also practises hospitality. See **John 14: 1 – 4:**

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.”

Jesus is preparing a place for us in His home, not at a hotel or some or other place. That's hospitality. Hospitality says that everything you have belongs to the Kingdom of God. There is none that are unwelcome, no sinner that will be turned away. That's Kingdom.

2. Our home/family is our most practical tool to use for the Gospel

- When we talk of homes we don't just mean a place but also a family. God wants our treasures and talents. He wants an amazing river of Gospel life to flow out of our homes.
- Hospitality is love in action. You want to tell me you love me? Well, is your door open? Hospitality is not about having the best house, a full fridge and the best crockery. Hospitality is about the home being open.
- The New Testament often challenges us to practice hospitality:

i. Matt 10:12-14 12

As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.

- If that home is not hospitable, Jesus says let your peace return to you.

ii. Rom 12:9-13 9

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and **seek to show**

hospitality.

iii. Heb 13:1-2 1

Let brotherly love continue. 2 **Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers**, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

iv. 1 Pet 4:8-10 8

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 **Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.** 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

v. 3 Jn 5-12 (To Gaius)

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Here's a whole letter in the Bible that's all about hospitality. Gaius was commended for his hospitality. He was obviously well known for it. And now, for all of eternity, he has been commended for it!

But can you see how wicked Diotrephes' heart had become? For all of eternity he is known as the guy who wanted to be first, so he stopped his own people from showing hospitality to others (vs 10b) and even put them out of the church if they did.

We live our lives from the inside out

Having our own devotion times must grip out hearts. Our home should be a place where we practice the Gospel. It starts with our devotions and then boils over to leading our families and then practicing the Gospel in hospitality.

1 Tim 3:1-8 and Titus 1:7-8 list hospitality as part of the qualifications of being a leader. It's not just about leading the home / family, but opening the home up for the Gospel.

3. Out of this culture of using our homes as a tool for the Gospel, we organise Life Groups in

homes and offices and wherever else necessary

The first church saw that it was necessary to meet in small groups. It's in the Scriptures as a model for us to follow. It's a Kingdom culture and therefore we want to practice it in our Christianity.

It ought to happen naturally (and many times it does) but we also formalise Life Group meetings for the sake of discipleship and shepherding. This isn't something we want to add on to our church life, it's something we want to make a part of our life and celebrate. The real nitty gritty of Christianity happens in homes (we love our wives from Monday to Sunday).

It's great to invite someone to a large corporate gathering but it's even better when we can invite them into our home and share the Gospel with them there. Are we known in our neighbourhoods as homes of healing? Or are we just known as the irritating Christians who play loud music?

We choose leaders from those who we see are getting it right at home, along with the other qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3. It doesn't mean they're perfect. It means that they know how to sort things out with God. We will address leadership more strongly in the next part.

We believe, unflinchingly, that this is the way we build the church Jesus is building.

This isn't something we've decided on beforehand and then have tried to find scriptures to support it. When we look at the New Testament we see this is how discipleship happens. It makes sense – it's much more sustainable that way. Everything God has called us to can happen in a home context and we want to make space for that to happen.

Questions to ask

1. What was so special about homes to Jesus?
2. Why was the book of Acts church focused on homes?
3. Is my home a fortress or a tool for the Gospel?
4. Do I understand the heart of hospitality?