

## Life Groups

### *Part 1: Living in the Kingdom from House to House*

The audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/living-in-the-kingdom-from-house-to-house/>

#### **Why We Meet the Way We Do**

It's always been God's desire that we co-labour with Him. We see this when we look at Jesus' ministry. For three and a half years as he goes around from village to village, city to city, he calls a group of twelve to Himself, trains them and sends them out to continue His work.

But how should they continue His work? After he has faced the cross and overcomes and is resurrected, He tells them to wait. Simply to wait. He promises that they are going to receive something that will let them be His witnesses even to the ends of the earth (Matt 28: 19, 20).

The first two chapters of Acts show us how Jesus built the Church and how he builds it today. It's important to remember that it has practical applications – it's not just giving us a history of what happened.

The Church is built on the revelation of Jesus Himself (Matthew 16: 13 – 18). That's where we first start seeing something about the 'Church' in the Scriptures. After that, God pours out His Spirit, which we see in Acts. The result of that outpouring is powerful preaching that cuts people to the heart and causes at first a desperate cry for salvation and then a response of an awe of God. That all leads to a devoted lifestyle, in particular devotion to the Word, prayer, the breaking of bread and fellowship (Acts 2:42). And if you look carefully you'll notice that they met in homes a great deal. So did Jesus in His ministry.

We're not called to make converts but disciples, which requires more than just preaching or wonderful corporate meetings but rather an interconnected and devoted lifestyle where there is a great deal of hospitality involved. It's in homes where relationship actually happens.

It's far better to let the Scriptures impose on us than we haul out some new manual of our own. When we look at Acts, it's easy to see that meeting in homes was a core culture that Jesus built into the life of His church right from the beginning. Let's go into detail here and break this all down.

#### **The promise of the Holy Spirit**

##### **Acts 1 (ESV):**

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began **to do and teach...**

Immediately we are confronted here with something that challenges our version of Christianity – Jesus both did and taught, which had an impact. His teaching was followed by doing and visa versa. He is the same today. We need both the demonstration of His power and the Gospel.

A dead Christianity is all about reams and reams of teaching. But teaching ought to produce Kingdom results with lives transformed, healings happening, cities being impacted and situations turned upside down – just like we see in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is poured out for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of establishing the Kingdom. You always need both doing and teaching, you can't lean on just one or the other.

2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Note that Jesus didn't speak about the Church but about the Kingdom. We'll pick this up a little later.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait** for the promise of the Father,

We need to wait for God at times. So often we rush ahead and do our thing and implore God to join us in what we're doing. But rather we ought to be joining Him in what He is doing.

which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

God's intention is that the whole Church is baptised in and with the Spirit. He never divided the church up into Baptists, Methodists or Wild Pentecostals, etc. We need to get out of the hyper-conservative or hyper-charismatic camps and focus on what we see in the Scriptures. The Spirit is for everyone.

### **The ascension**

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But **you** will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon **you**, and **you** will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Here is the key issue of everything. Jesus' desire is to fill His Church with His Spirit. He puts us in community and impacts us in our togetherness so that we can be witnesses. There's a partnership with Him that takes place. We witness wherever we are. The Gospel must go out in power – His Spirit.

### **Outpouring of the Spirit**

#### **Acts 2: 2 - 5**

2 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[a] 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.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

We start seeing the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Acts 1 – that the disciples would be His witnesses to all nations. God puts the early church straight away in an opportunity to do just that – *after* He has filled them with the Spirit, not before.

Right on our doorstep is the nations – in our city. Now when this happened see how the crowds responded:

6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were **bewildered**, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were **amazed** and **astonished**, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

When the Spirit comes on a church it impacts everyone. And what's the first thing we see coming out of the hearts of these Christians from the upper room? Praise. This praise left people amazed and perplexed.

12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

You will always have these two responses – those who realise that something's happening here, and they are amazed and perplexed; and, of course, the hacklers. Don't be surprised when some mock you and even accuse you of being drunk when you speak the Gospel!

### **Anointed preaching**

After Jesus pours out His Spirit we see Peter preach, quoting from the book of Joel around God's promise that He would pour out His Spirit. After His sermon (Acts 2: 14 – 36) see the response:

37 Now when they heard this they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?”

38 And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter doesn't make distinctions. He mentions all these things together – repent, be baptised, receive the Spirit. This is for all believers.

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Think about what this must have been like for this church. You go to bed with 120 people in your local church and you know you need to pray and wait. You wake up the next morning, go to a prayer meeting, and by the end of the day you are now 3120 people! If we want to reach our city and do what God has called us to do, it's not going to be through clever planning and strategising, decked-out buildings and the like. Rather, we need the anointed power of God which will result in men and women alive with the Gospel.

### **A Devoted Way of Life**

So, how does this pertain to meeting in homes? Well, see how this worked. After the initial three thousand, the Scriptures say that numbers were added to them daily. Then later on two thousand were added until twenty-five percent of the city were born again! Then they were dispersed and they went out preaching, with the Antioch church being planted. Here Paul and Barnabas were sent and Galatia opened to them and eventually there are churches all around Asia Minor. Then they go to Europe (Ephesus) and it was all impacted.

It started with 120 waiting on God. Do you think God's ideal is to get a small bunch of people together and make sure they're secure and happy? No, he has a great purpose in mind. He looks at 120 people and he can see Asia Minor impacted; Europe impacted; the world. We're the seed He wants to use. From your small group of people that gather at a house God sees nations changed.

The question is, how best can we shepherd? We're not about converts but disciples, so how do we disciple? God has a way that He builds the Church that we need to grab hold of. But we can't do that unless we are convicted about it. And Acts 2:42 addresses that:

42 And they *devoted* themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Devotion has to be the way we're characterised as believers. In this scripture we see that devotion was the norm. We only have one shot at this thing called life: why not rather be devoted to God and His mission than be all over the place and all about our mission? What will count in the end? Our agenda or God's agenda?

So how did they live out God's agenda? Through devotion – devotion to the Word of God (the apostles' teaching; devotion to prayer; devotion to the breaking of bread and devotion to fellowship).

43 And awe came upon every soul...

See this – awe came on the whole church without a permanent building, a sound system, lighting or smoke machines etc. I have a pastor in Durban to thank for that insight. We can't rely on these kinds

of set-ups to get people in. They ought to come in for the Gospel – not because we have a great anything but because we have a great God.

43b ...and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And with this the miracles flowed. Not everyone was healed, but people were getting healed, delivered, saved. God is wanting to restore that to us.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 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 favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

These were a hospitable people. Homes were open. Because they built this way God added. This isn't what you find at most 'Church growth seminars'. At those generally the 'Three B's' are preached – Bucks; Bums in Seats; and Buildings. Whatever it takes to bring the money in and to get guys to stay is the core focus. But God's way is different.

You see throughout Scripture that when you build things His way then He fills it with His Spirit, His Power, and then the people come. In the Old Testament the Ark had to get built His Way; the Temple had to be built according to His pattern. Then He came. Like in the book of Ezekiel, once it's built according to God's way then He fills it with His Spirit. And if He's there then it grows.

### **So how do we meet?**

Let's address the heart of why we're meeting first before getting into the practical applications.

#### **1. Acts 1:3 – Kingdom first**

From Acts 1:3 you can see that it's all about the Kingdom first. We're not about church growth but about the Kingdom impacting this world. We're not saying Life Groups are important because they've proven to be a great formula for making a big church. No, the Church serves God's Kingdom agenda. Jesus is establishing the Kingdom of God through the Church. Life Group is a key way in which we serve this agenda because it's where real discipling takes place. You can't disciple closely in large, corporate settings.

#### **2. 1:8 – Our Apostolic purpose**

We only ever do what we do with the infilling of the Spirit. We are called to be witnesses by His infilling. The Church is supposed to impact “Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8)”.

And who is Samaria to us? The demographic that doesn't look like you. (The Jews hated the

Samaritans.) It's the cultures we're not used to and they're here in our borders and outside our borders as we go to the ends of the earth.

### **3. 2:37-41 – The heart of the matter**

We must be convicted in our hearts. We need to be crying out to God, "What must I do?" just like the crowds did in Acts. And the answer to their question? Be filled with the Spirit and be baptised (Acts 2:38). Identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We live on way too much human sweat and not enough on His power.

### **4. 2:42 – The importance of personal devotion**

We can preach as much as we like but how is your personal devotion? This is the way in which we "work out our salvation" (Philippians 2: 12, 13) – we are devoted to the Word; to prayer; to the fellowship; and to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). We need to make a personal decision to change our patterns and live devoted. It must come from the inside out or else it will never produce the Kingdom.

If you don't have a personal devotion to Christ and His ways then you won't really understand why meeting in homes is so important, why discipling is so paramount. Too much of our Christianity these days is about getting the congregation together and teaching them some Christian 'tricks' – formulas for this and that. When you meet in homes the point is to disciple, not to teach some new gimmick.

We need to come back to the drawing board – find the best time of your day and give God that time. When was the last time you got excited about planning some time off to wait on God? Devotion starts with us as individuals and that life will then boil over to us in our togetherness. We are dead without our personal devotion to God.

### **5. 2:43-47 – Why we meet the way we do?**

We get the value of meeting in homes from the Scriptures. Jesus is building His Church. What He did back then by the Holy Spirit He will do and wants to do today.

Jesus looked over the 120 in that upper room and saw how they would impact a city, a region and beyond. He's committed to doing the same thing today as he looks over your Life Group.

He is ushering us towards Acts 1:8 – a Christianity that is both done and spoken. We are devoted to the Word of God (the Apostles' teaching in Acts 2:42) and we see in the Word that the early church met both in large corporate meetings – they met in the temple – and in homes (Acts 2: 46), so that's why we do it the same way.

The congregational dynamic has wonderful benefits but as they in Acts worked out their Christianity in a discipleship way it was fleshed out in a smaller context. It's impossible to disciple effectively in a large, congregational setting. If all the leaders of our church were taken out and the building was

closed down, our church should still continue, because the church is wherever we get together – it's not a building.

Fellowship is a very misunderstood word and the English language doesn't convey the richness of what the word means in the Scriptures. Here we see that relationships move into friendships into covenant and then into partnership. We see how Jesus partnered with his disciples when He sent them out.

God is wanting to put partnerships together. Dynamics that happen in little groups, something of the Kingdom that transacts there, just doesn't happen in a larger setting. And so meeting in homes continue to be a big part of how Jesus builds his church.

#### *Questions to ask*

1. What is the relationship between the God's Kingdom and the church? (Acts 1:3)
2. What is our purpose as believers? (Acts 1:8)
3. What is the heart of the matter? (Acts 2:37-41)
4. What's all the fuss about personal devotion? (Acts 2:42)
5. Why do we meet the way we do? (Acts 2:43-47)