

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
AT SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH, SALEM, KENTUCKY

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A Project  
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The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

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Doctor of Ministry

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by  
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**APPROVAL SHEET**

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY  
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## PREFACE

The completion of this work would not have been possible without the support of several individuals. My faculty supervisor, Dr. Adam Greenway, consistently challenged me to think in a more focused way and provided much needed encouragement along the way that helped persevere throughout the writing process.

My wife, Alana, has been a constant support throughout this experience. She has prayed for me and believed in me when I did not think I would be able to press on. I am thankful to God for the gift he has given me in her.

I want to give glory to God for bringing me into the Dmin program. He has used this process to refine me as a Christian, husband and leader.

Mark A. Combs

Hazard, Kentucky

March, 2011

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Purpose**

The purpose of this project was to develop and establish an effective small group ministry at Salem Baptist Church, Salem, Kentucky.

#### **Goals**

This project had five goals it hoped to accomplish. The first goal was to lead the church in seeing how small groups help accomplish the purpose of the church. Small groups provide an ideal environment for Christians to receive care and encouragement to apply the biblical message to their lives. Small groups also provide the ideal context where Christians can discover and use their spiritual gifts. The members of Salem Baptist Church learned the effectiveness of small groups in achieving the church's purpose through the preaching of a four-week sermon series dealing with the subject of community and the role of small groups in the local church (Appendix 2). The sermon series coincided with a four-week curriculum (Appendix 3), which I wrote, and was utilized in the Connect Groups. The curriculum provided further biblical instruction on the role of small groups in the church and gave each group an opportunity for application specific to that group.

The second goal of this project was to see 80 percent of the active members of Salem Baptist Church join a Connect Group. By a constant emphasis on the expectations of members to be involved in a Connect Group, members were challenged to join a small group environment.

The third goal of the project was to train the current Connect Group leaders to become better small group leaders. To accomplish this goal I used the material that was the subject matter for chapter 3 of my project, which provides characteristics of effective small group leaders. The material was turned into a seven-week course that the leaders went through in a setting with other small group leaders (Appendix 5).

The fourth goal was for me to become a better discipler of the small group leaders. Connect groups serve as an extension of the pastoral ministry through application of truth and leading the primary environment for soul care in the church. This goal sharpened my ability to mentor individuals and reproduce myself in the lives of leaders in the church.

I had regular conversations with the Connect Group leaders concerning their spiritual growth, the well being of their families and the growth of their group. I also recommended other materials including books, conferences and sermons from other pastors and leaders in situations where the leader may find them helpful.

### **Context**

Salem Baptist Church is located in the town of Salem, a rural community in Western Kentucky. The population of Salem is estimated to be 789 people.<sup>1</sup> The estimated population of people living within a five-mile radius of the church is 2,240.<sup>2</sup> The population of Salem is projected to grow by 2.7 percent in five years.<sup>3</sup> The level of diversity in Salem is very low. The percentage of people who are not Caucasian is only 1

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<sup>1</sup>Center for Missional Research, *Know Your Community* (privately printed, 2008).

<sup>2</sup>“Ten Basic Facts About the People in 42078 – Salem, KY” [on-line]; accessed 5 August 2008; available from <http://www.link2lead.com/MyCommunity/10Facts.aspx?Report=S>; Internet.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.



percent.<sup>4</sup> The largest represented lifestyle group in the area is “Rural Families,” representing 67 percent of the people in the area.<sup>5</sup>

Salem is an agricultural community. A large percentage of its residents earn their living by farming. There are also several rock quarries that employ many of those living in the area. The largest neighboring city is Paducah, Kentucky, which is thirty-three miles away from Salem.

The average age in Salem is 44.5 and the typical income is \$46,257.<sup>6</sup> The percentage of people in Salem who have graduated from college is 6 percent, which is drastically lower than the national average of 24 percent.<sup>7</sup> Salem Baptist Church finds itself ministering in a community that is rural, middle class, with the majority of people having only a high school diploma.

Salem Baptist Church was founded on February 27, 1891, when a group met at a neighboring church known as Union Church “for the purpose of forming a presbytery to consider the propriety of organizing a Baptist Church.”<sup>8</sup> The church was originally named First United Baptist Church of Christ of Salem. The name of the church was changed to the current name, Salem Baptist Church, over a half-century after the founding. The church purchased the land it is currently located on and built its first building in 1910. A new sanctuary and fellowship hall were built in 1975 and an educational wing was then added in 1979. The church has remained at the same location

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

<sup>5</sup>“First View – Salem, KY; accessed 5 August 2008; available from <http://www.link2lead.com/PDF/download.aspx?temp=true&menu=MyComm&name=KVc.pdf&oid=388210&uid=462618>[on-line]; Internet.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Pauline Stegall, "Centennial History of Salem Baptist Church, Salem, KY" (privately printed, 1991), 14.

throughout its history and currently uses the facilities built in 1975 and 1979.

Salem Baptist has had twenty-one pastors in their history. T.C. Carter, the church's first pastor, served the church for sixteen years. Carter was the moderator at the meeting that led to the organization of Salem Baptist. He was elected to be the church's pastor unanimously at the church's first business meeting in March 1891. He resigned from the pastorate after responding to the call from another church to be their pastor.

By the end of the church's first twenty-five years the total membership of the church was ninety-five people. The membership remained around one hundred between the years 1917 to 1927. The church experienced a sharp decline in membership in 1928, the low being sixty-three in 1936. The reason for the decline was a doctrinal conflict between the church and the local association. The church withdrew itself from the association on September 27, 1930 because the association was said to have "endorsed unbaptistic beliefs."<sup>9</sup> The church reapplied for membership to the association in March 1935.

When World War II ended in 1945, the church experienced the largest amount of growth it had seen in its history. Growth was not only experienced in the church, but also in the city of Salem. A local mine flourished, which resulted in economic growth in the area, bringing in new businesses and increasing the population. It was around this time that city water was installed which resulted in the city getting a fire department, hospital, and nursing home.

The growth that was occurring in the city eventually made its way into the church. J.W. Hansen was pastor during this period and he served the church for twenty-six years. The longevity of his ministry resulted in leading the church through a great time of growth. At the beginning of Pastor Hansen's ministry at Salem, the membership was 86. When he left, the membership was at 268. Two years into pastor

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 4.

Hansen's time at Salem, the average offering was just over \$5000. In 1967, one year after his ministry at Salem ended, the average offering was over \$19,000.

The period from 1967-1991 witnessed a great amount of organizational and structural growth. It was during this time that the current facility was constructed, along with the current parsonage. Pauline Stegall, a former member of Salem Baptist Church who has compiled the history of the church, wrote concerning this period, "More new programs and ministries were begun during this era than ever before."<sup>10</sup> The offerings that the church collected in 1991 were \$124,504, which gave the church opportunities to give to various mission agencies and assist the community, as they had never been able to do at the past. The membership of the church reached another high during this time, rising to 346 in 1986. The pastor of the church at this time was Charles Woody, who left in 1992.

Following the ministry of Pastor Woody the church was led by two pastors prior to my arrival, Jim Dwiggins and John East. The church's current membership is 261. Of the 261 members that the church currently has, an average of 140 actually attend on a Sunday. The church's membership has stayed at virtually the same level for twenty-two years. In their book *Comeback Churches*, Ed Stetzer and Mike Dodson write, that between seventy to eighty percent of North American churches are either stagnant or declining.<sup>11</sup> Salem Baptist Church would currently be classified as a stagnant church.

Over the past five years, Salem has experienced an increase of membership at a rate of eight to nine additions per year. Those additions have primarily been transfer growth. Since my arrival at Salem, the church has baptized one to two persons per year. Those baptisms represent individuals who have joined our church as transfers from other

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 20.

<sup>11</sup>Ed Stetzer, and Mike Dodson, *Comeback Churches. How 300 Churches Turned Around and Yours Can Too* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 19.

churches and have needed to be re-baptized or baptized for the first time. Several years ago, the church purchased the property that was formerly the only school in Salem. The church purchased the building and has converted the gym into a Christian Life Center. The rationale for purchasing the property was the potential it had for reaching the community. The property has brought no growth to the church, however, and is largely unused.

These statistics show that the church was experiencing no conversion growth. Because the church was not seeing members leave the congregation, a large number of members were not aware of the church's stagnant state. The church has started several new ministries, other ministries have continued at the same level they have been at for years, leading a good number of members to not see the reality of the church's status.

When I became pastor of the church in January 2007, it became clear to me that the church lacked a clear vision for its existence. Surprisingly, though many in the church are unaware of the stagnancy the church was in, they agreed with my assessment. Specifically, the area where people saw the greatest need for the church to define itself was in the area of assimilation and discipleship. The question, "what will the church do with those that God brings?" was the question that urgently needed an answer.

A few months after my arrival, I led the church in adopting the following mission statement: "Salem Baptist Church exists to see gospel transformation in our church, into the city, and to the corners of the earth." The mission statement reminded the church of its need to actively get the gospel to the world around them, so that people may be transformed by it. Another purpose of the mission statement was to keep the church mindful of its own need for constant transformation. The mission statement served as a grid for the church to evaluate its activities and future planning. An example of this was seen as the finance committee used the mission statement to examine how the

church used its money in the previous years and redistributed areas of the budget so that the church's finances could better help the church accomplish its mission.

Much of my time as pastor at Salem Baptist Church was spent in leading the church toward adopting a comprehensive discipleship process that would encompass the entire church. The discipleship process sought to resolve the assimilation and discipleship needs previously mentioned. The goal of the process was to move individuals who visited the church toward becoming fully devoted members of the church. Small groups were central to that process.

### **Rationale**

The biblical story clearly establishes God's goal that humanity not exist in isolation. Rather, God's design is for mankind to be in community. Community is seen in the Godhead, prior to creation, as God has eternally existed as Trinity. While Christians do not worship three gods, the Bible says that the one true God has eternally existed as three distinct persons. Tim Lane and Paul Tripp clearly express the significance of the Trinity's impact on the biblical theme of community by declaring that "the most important reason for community is the reality that God himself lives in community!"<sup>12</sup>

When the account of creation is given in Scripture, community is seen in the creation of Adam and Eve. Repeated in the opening chapter of Genesis is God's declaration, as he looks at what he has made, that it is good (Gen 1:10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31). When God sees Adam alone in the garden, for the first time in creation God says something is not good. "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him" (Gen 2:18). God then remedies the situation by making Eve.

As the biblical story moves beyond the garden, the focus turns to Abram in

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<sup>12</sup>Tim Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch Press, 2006), 77.

Genesis 12. God promises that from Abram, God will make a “great nation” (Gen. 12:2).

This great nation would be called the nation of Israel. Once again, the theme of community that runs throughout the Bible is seen as God makes a nation, or community of people. In the Old Testament, individuals who would follow the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would not do this as individuals, rather they would join the community of Israel.

When Jesus comes, he also models the necessity of community by calling the twelve disciples. Even among the twelve, Jesus had a smaller group of three. Peter, James, and John, experienced a deeper intimacy with Jesus than the remainder of the disciples. An examination of the life of Jesus shows that his method of making disciples was by being in community with them. They were with him, seeing him interact with people, learning from him how to do evangelism and what it meant to be a follower of Jesus. Jesus, in return, invested in the lives of the disciples. Luke 8 provides a clear example of this as the disciples ask Jesus to explain the meaning of the parable of the sower. Jesus does not send the disciples away. Instead, he tells them of the privileged position they have in being given the knowledge of the secrets of God’s kingdom and then he takes the time to explain the parable to them, point by point (Luke 8:9-15).

After Jesus’ ascension, the church would be born. Now, individuals who repent of their sin and trust in Christ are made a part of the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:12-31). Paul states in 1 Corinthians 12:27, “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it”. Paul clearly shows that individuals make up the body of Christ. In other words, individuals become a part of the community of God’s people. This community displays itself in local congregations that meet in various locations throughout the world. When one looks at the early church in the book of Acts, those believers apparently saw the need for deeper fellowship outside of the usual corporate gathering. Immediately following the account of Pentecost, the Bible shows the early church gathering in a larger group and then in smaller groups, known as house churches. This is clearly seen in Acts

2:46, “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes”.

The idea of community is also seen in Paul’s use of the phrase “one another”. At least fifty times, Paul uses the phrase “one another” in his letters to churches. To the church at Colossae he writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom” (Col 3:16). Paul’s simple but profound point in repeatedly using the phrase “one another” is that the church should be a vital community of believers who are encouraging one another and caring for the souls of other believers in the congregation.

While the theme of community holds a significant place in Scripture, what needs to be stated is that the goal of biblical community is making disciples. Jeffrey Arnold, in his book *The Big Book on Small Groups*, asserts that the mentality found too often when churches think about discipleship is they think about Christians in a class such as Sunday School, in other words there is a programmatic view of discipleship. He continues, “What they forget is that the process of disciple-making is a dynamic relationship between fellow Christians and their Lord, and that it is marked by continued progress.”<sup>13</sup> There is nothing wrong with classes in and of themselves; however, those classes need to be a part of an overall discipleship process that seeks to move individuals forward in spiritual growth.

The goal of this project was to establish an effective small group ministry at Salem Baptist Church that provided the proper context where true biblical community could take place with the goal of making disciples. As has been stated in the previous section, Salem Baptist Church has not seen growth in twenty-two years, making it a stagnant church. The church has an approach to ministry that is common among established churches, consisting primarily of programs and various classes. While there

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<sup>13</sup>Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL; InterVarsity Press, 2004), 23.

is nothing inherently wrong with this style of ministry, it often lacks direction and a progression which is consistent with the process of sanctification.

The church was in need of a clear path for making disciples. Small Groups would be central in that path. In a small group setting relationships can be formed with the intentional purpose of helping members apply Scripture to their lives, discover and use their spiritual gifts, and contribute to ministry. These small groups would help the church fulfill its overall mission.

These goals are included in the purposes of the church's small groups. I have led the church to adopt the purposes of its small groups, known as connect groups, to be connecting people to God, each other, and the church.

### **Definitions and Limitations**

Throughout this project, I used the definition of small groups from Jeffrey Arnold's book, *The Big Book on Small Groups*: "A small group is intent on participating with Christ in building his ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world."<sup>14</sup> The reader should also know that Salem Baptist Church named its small groups Connect Groups. In 2008 the congregation voted to change the name of Sunday School to Connect Groups. The title Sunday School was not helpful in identifying for people the purpose of the small groups. The purpose of small groups was to connect people to God, each other, and the church. Therefore, the title 'Connect Groups' kept the goal of small groups fresh in the minds of the people.

The duration of the project was a limitation. I preached a four-week sermon series on the role of small groups in the church (Appendix 2) which was accompanied by

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 23.



a four-week curriculum the Connect Groups studied that went along with the sermon series (Appendix 3). The time allotted for these studies was limited, providing the groups with only a brief period in which to apply various small group principles. The material covered needs to be re-examined at a later time for further application.

Another limitation was the decision to spend the majority of training during the fifteen-week project on the Connect Group leaders as opposed to the congregation as a whole. The reason for focusing on the leaders specifically had its roots in Ephesians 4:11-12, “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” The goal in focusing primarily on the Connect Group leaders was to equip the equippers. By imparting the leaders with the training needed to lead their group, they could pass what they learned on to those they led.

### **Research Methodology**

This project had four goals it sought to accomplish. The first goal was to show the church how small groups helped accomplish the purpose of the church. This goal was achieved by preaching a four-week sermon series dealing with the Bible’s emphasis on the need for believers to be in community with one another for the growth of the church and spread of the gospel (Appendix 2) and the corresponding small group curriculum (Appendix 3). The first sermon was entitled “community”. The aim of this sermon was to give a biblical theology of community. The second sermon was called “one another” and the main text was Hebrews 10:24-25. This sermon dealt with the significance of relationships in the Christian life. Ephesians 2:14-22 and 4:11-17 was the text for the third sermon and focused on the first aspect of the church’s mission statement, “Gospel Transformation in our church through Connect Groups.” The goal in this sermon was to show the church that the process of sanctification happens as believers are stirring each

other up and encouraging one another in the context of small groups. The final sermon in the series was titled “Gospel Transformation in our city and to the corners of the earth through Connect Groups” from John 13:34-35. In this passage, Jesus talks about the role of love in people knowing we are his disciples. The church saw that the love it expressed for one another within the community of faith was the most powerful evangelistic tool it possessed. While the sermon series took place, the Connect Groups studied a four-week curriculum that I wrote, which will help them apply small group dynamics to their specific group. The first session of the Connect Group curriculum was titled “community” (the names for each Connect Group lesson was identical to the sermon title it corresponded to in the series). The Connect Groups discussed 1 Corinthians 12:12-31, focusing how God saves us for community and believers are meant to utilize their spiritual gifts in the community of Christians. In the second small group session, the groups read several of the “one another” passages and explored several ways those passages could be applied in their group. The third small group session examined how small groups help the church achieve the first aspect of its mission statement, “Gospel transformation in our church.” There was a large discussion about the nature of sanctification and the role other believers are to play in an individual’s conformity to Christ. The final session explored how Connect Groups should be evangelistic in nature. The passage studied during this session was Matthew 5:13-16 where Jesus calls the church to be salt and light in the world. The groups were then challenged to consider numerous ways their groups could seek to share the gospel in the surrounding community.

The second goal was to have eighty percent of the membership of Salem

Baptist Church involved in a Connect Group. Membership totals for Connect Groups are taken every week. We compared Connect Group attendance to the total membership of the church to determine the percentage of members actively involved in a Connect Group.

The third goal of the project was to train the Connect Group leaders to become better small group leaders. The material I used for training was the subject of the third chapter of this project. Chapter 3 provided characteristics of an effective small group leader. The chapter was turned into a seven-week training class, which our Connect Group leaders attended. I also provided the Connect Group leaders with a questionnaire regarding areas they would like to grow in as Connect Group leaders.

The final goal for the project was to become a better discipler of the individuals who led the Connect Groups. I started to have regular conversations with each Connect Group leader solely for the purpose of encouragement and accountability.

## CHAPTER 2

### A BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL BASIS FOR SMALL GROUPS

This chapter endeavors to establish a biblical and theological foundation for small groups by examining in detail the biblical doctrine of community. First, there will be an examination of the Trinity and the role of community among the members of the godhead. Second, there will be a redemptive-historical survey of the doctrine of community in Scripture, with special attention given to Paul's writings. Finally, the doctrine of progressive sanctification and the role of community in sanctification will be established.

#### **Community in the Trinity**

Any discussion on community must begin with God, specifically looking at the doctrine of the Trinity. God has revealed himself to be a communal being rather than a solitary one. The doctrine of the Trinity is hinted at in the Old Testament Scriptures and progressively revealed throughout redemptive history, in particular the New Testament with the coming of Jesus and the Holy Spirit. When seeking to understand the doctrine of the Trinity, theologian Robert Reymond, comments,

Three propositions (or doctrines) are essential to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity: (1) there is but one living and true God who is eternally and immutably indivisible (the doctrine of monotheism); (2) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each fully and equally God (the doctrine of the three Persons' 'sameness in divine essence); and (3) the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are each distinct Persons (the doctrine of the three Persons' 'distinctness in subsistence).'<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Robert Reymond, *A New Systematic Theology of the Christian Faith* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1998), 205-06.

Reymond's propositions are necessary in a discussion on community among the members of the godhead because they serve to clarify what is not being claimed. To speak of community among the members of the godhead is not an attempt to say that there are three distinct gods who are in communion with one another. Rather, the issue of community among the godhead maintains the orthodox view of the Trinity (as has been expressed by Reymond, among others),<sup>2</sup> yet seeks to highlight the truth of God revealing himself to be a relational being. The need for community among Men and women is mirrored after the perfect community that has always existed among the members of the Trinity.

In the creation account God says, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen 1:26). While some commentators interpret the "us" in this passage as God speaking to the heavenly court,<sup>3</sup> others see here a dialogue among the members of the Trinity. Robert Letham points out the difficulty of holding to a view of God speaking to the heavenly court by noting that "the agents addressed are invited to share in the creation of man, and this power is never attributed to angels elsewhere in the Bible."<sup>4</sup> Wayne Grudem affirms the view that Genesis 1:26 provides a partial revelation of the Trinity: "Already in the first chapter of Genesis we have an indication of a plurality of persons in God himself. We are not told how many persons, and we have nothing approaching a complete doctrine of the Trinity, but it is implied that more than one person is involved."<sup>5</sup> Similar language is found in Genesis 3:22; 11:7, and Isaiah 6:8.

These passages are important in thinking about community among the

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<sup>2</sup>See Herman Bavinck, *Reformed Dogmatics*, vol. 2, *God and Creation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2004), 256-334; R. L. Dabney, *Systematic Theology* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 174-82; Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 346-67; Allen Vander Pol, *God in Three Persons* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2001).

<sup>3</sup>Bruce Waltke, *Genesis: A Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 64-65.

<sup>4</sup>Robert Letham, *The Holy Trinity in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2004), 19.

<sup>5</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 227.

members of the Trinity. God the Father is revealing himself to be a relational being acting in community with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Robert Letham makes the following comments on Genesis 1:26-27:

Man exists as a duality, the one in relation to the other. . . . As for God himself the context points to his own intrinsic relationality. The plural occurs on three occasions in v. 26, yet God is also singular in v. 27. God is placed in parallel with man, made in his image as male and female, who is described both in the singular and plural. Behind it all is the distinction God/Spirit of God/speech of God in vv. 1-3. . . . [T]his relationality will in the development of biblical revelation eventually be disclosed as taking the form of a triunity.<sup>6</sup>

The issue of God being in perfect community, revealed in verse 26, should not be separated from the creation of humanity in his image. Tim Chester and Steve Timmis in their book *Total Church* are helpful in making such a connection:

When it comes to humanity, God does not simply speak a word of command; he engages in conversation. “Let us make man in our image.” This conversation shows that God himself is a social rather than a solitary being. And so his image cannot be borne by an individual, but by man and woman together. . . . divine personhood is defined in relation terms. The Father is the Father because he has a Son. God is persons-in-community. Human personhood is defined in relational terms.<sup>7</sup>

In creating man and woman, God created humanity to mirror the community he has perfectly in the Trinity. Such community is in stark contrast to any worldview which lays emphasis on the individual to the exclusion of community. The Bibles opening chapters clearly show that while men and women are individuals, created in God’s image, they are also to view themselves in relation to one another.

The *imago Dei* is the explanation behind humanities need for relationships and community. Princeton Professor Robert Wuthnow, in his study on Americans quest for community, entitled *Sharing the Journey* provides the following insight on the popularity of small groups:

Forty percent of the American public is currently involved in some kind of small group. For those of us who look around and take our cues from others (don’t we all

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<sup>6</sup>Letham, *The Holy Spirit in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 21.

<sup>7</sup>Tim Chester and Steve Timmis, *Total Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 40-41.

do this?), it is easy to conclude that something important must be happening if this many people are involved. Some readers may of course disagree that this is a significant proportion of the population. I was surprised, however, that the figure is this high. The standard theories had led me to believe either that Americans were so individualistic that they would not be interested in being involved or that other forms of community were still strong enough that there would be no need for people to join these groups. For this reason alone, the fact that so many people are involved seems striking. Clearly, based on membership figures alone, the small-group movement has become a profoundly important phenomenon in American society. Millions of people are meeting regularly with small groups of like-minded individuals to find caring and support. Whether we are involved ourselves or whether we are critical bystanders, we must reckon with this movement if we are to understand the present character of our society.<sup>8</sup>

While the Bible clearly shows that there is one God (Deut 6:4), because of the truth revealed in the opening chapters of Genesis and the progressive revelation of the Scriptures, it is imperative that God never be viewed as a being in isolation (that is, one member of the Trinity in isolation from the others). Each person of the Trinity does have his own role, yet none of them works in seclusion from the other. An example of this relationship is found in the account of creation. God the Father is speaking creation into existence, the Holy Spirit is seen “hovering” over the waters (Gen 1:2), and Paul writes in Colossians, “all things were created” through Jesus (Col 1:16).

Therefore, to be true image bearers of God, men and women should view themselves in relation to others in community rather than as isolated autonomous individuals. Commenting on God’s declaration in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (ESV), Bruce Waltke says, “Relationship is modeled after God who does not exist in isolation but is a triunity, surrounded by a heavenly court.”<sup>9</sup> After the fall, sin separated humanity not only from God, but also from each other. The relationship between the gospel and community will be explored at length in the following section, but it should be noted at this point that the gospel not only reconciles humanity to God, but also to each other in the body of Christ. Gospel-reconciliation

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<sup>8</sup>Robert Wuthnow, *Sharing the Journey* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 342.

<sup>9</sup>Waltke, *Genesis*, 88.

enables men and women to represent the community God originally intended in the garden.

The New Testament provides a clearer picture of the community experienced by the members of the Trinity, especially in the relationship between Jesus and the Father. At the baptism of Jesus, all of the members of the Trinity are clearly seen. The Son is baptized, the Spirit is descending on him, and the Father expressly says that Jesus is his Son and is well pleased with him.

The words of God the Father to Jesus provide great insight into the intimate relationship they have always enjoyed in the Trinity. God the Father says, “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11). Mark’s gospel records two instances of the Father saying “my Son” to Jesus. One instance being the baptism of Jesus and the other, the transfiguration (9:7). The Father does not simply call Jesus his son, however; he calls him his “beloved son.” James Edwards speaks to the importance of the words from the Father to Son:

In the sublime declaration to Jesus at the baptism we encounter Fatherly love and filial obedience, kingship and suffering service. Each is a facet of what it means to be the Son of God. To no prophet had words been spoken such as the words to Jesus at the baptism. Abraham was a friend of God (Isa 41:8), Moses a servant of God (Deut 34:5), Aaron a chosen one of God (Ps 105:26), David a man after God’s own heart (1 Sam 13:14), and Paul an apostle (Rom 1:1). Only Israel (Exod 4:23) – and king as Israel’s leader (Ps 2:7) – had been called God’s Son before. But where Israel failed, Jesus takes its place.<sup>10</sup>

The declaration of the Father that Jesus is his “beloved son” speaks to a relationship that has existed not only prior to the incarnation, but into eternity past. Further glimpses of the relationship between the Father and the Son are seen in Jesus’ high priestly prayer: “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed” (John 17:5). Jesus also prays for the unity of believers to mirror the perfect unity he has with the Father (21), and he speaks of the

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<sup>10</sup>James Edwards, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 38.



love the Father has for him “before the foundation of the world” (25). In John 20:17, Jesus speaks to Mary Magdalene and calls God his Father. All of these texts point to a relationship between the Father and the Son, prior to creation that consisted of love, care, and unity. Robert Letham describes the relationship between the Father and the Son:

In short, Jesus as Son claims a relation to the Father of great personal intimacy, exclusive and unique, which is marked by full and willing obedience to the Father. He is distinct from the Father, and yet one with him. The intimacy is one of “unusual familiarity,” and is of intense interest and relevance to his followers. It distinguishes him from the prophets and, in the writings of Paul, entails his participation in God’s attributes, sharing in his glory, so that he is “worthy to receive formal veneration with God in Christian assemblies.”<sup>11</sup>

The unity among the Trinity is seen in Jesus’ teaching on the coming of the Holy Spirit in John’s gospel. “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to remembrance all that I have said to you (John 14:26). True community cannot exist where there is not unity of purpose. The Spirit being sent by the Father in the name of Jesus reveals the unity that each member of the Trinity has around the purpose of God redeeming a people for himself.

Jesus also points out that the Spirit’s task will not be to speak for himself; rather it will be to remind believers of what Jesus has said and done. D. A. Carson comments that “in John’s Gospel the disciples are shown to fail, throughout Jesus’ ministry, in their understanding of Jesus. One of the Spirit’s principal tasks, after Jesus is glorified, is to remind the disciples of Jesus’ teaching and thus, in the new situation after the resurrection, to help them grasp its significance and thus to teach them what it meant.”<sup>12</sup> Therefore the unity that is being expressed in the Spirit’s ministry is that his task is not to speak independently of the Son, but rather to point the first disciples and all subsequent ones to Christ.

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<sup>11</sup>Letham, *The Holy Spirit in Scripture, History, Theology, and Worship*, 39.

<sup>12</sup>D. A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester: Apollos, 2002), 505.

The designation of God as Father is also unique to the New Testament, becoming the primary way of addressing God. When one considers the community that exists among family members, such community is modeled after the Trinity. Paul speaks to this notion in Ephesians 6 regarding the roles of husbands and wives in marriage. Paul says that these relationships are designed to represent the relationship between “Christ and the church” (Eph 5:32). Just as all the members of the Trinity were at work in creation, all were active in the work of salvation. Therefore, Paul is stating that the family is modeled after the Trinitarian relationship between the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

### **The Theme of Community in Redemptive History**

Community finds its origin and perfect expression in the Trinity. Because God exists in perfect community among the members of the Trinity, community should also be reflected among his image-bearers.

The significance of community for humanity is seen in God’s creation of male and female (1:27) and God’s declaration that it is not good that the man should be alone (2:18). Within that declaration the author of Genesis is providing the reader with God’s perspective on man’s newly created environment. Kenneth Mathews provides very helpful insight on God’s declaration in 2:18:

The Hebrew construction of v. 18 accentuates the negative phrase “not good” by placing it at the head of the sentence. God has made the man and provided a beautiful environment with honorable work, a setting men may sometimes consider idyllic, but God announces that more is to be done to achieve the ideal for the man. God’s concern is that man is “alone”. Whether the man felt his aloneness at first is not stated; only the divine viewpoint is given. God has created human life to have fellowship with him but also to be a social entity, building relationships with other human beings ‘[Man] will not live until he loves, giving himself away to another on his own level.’ Isolation is not the divine norm for human beings; community is the creation of God.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Kenneth A. Mathews, *Genesis 1-11:26: The New American Commentary*, vol. 1A (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 213.

God's original intention for the garden was to be a place of perfect community between himself and his creation. The account of the fall in Genesis 3 details the marring of that community. In this we see the destruction of community on the horizontal level, between man and woman, and also on the vertical level, between humanity and God.

The serpent, from the beginning, attempted to isolate Eve from Adam, trying to deceive her to choose to believe him over her husband. Eve succumbs to the serpent's lies. Gone immediately was the community that Adam and Eve had originally experienced with one another. Moses provides the following commentary on the breakdown of community, "Then the eyes of both of them were open, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths" (Gen 3:7, ESV). Compare this verse to Genesis 2:25, prior to the fall, as God presents the man to the woman. "And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed" (Gen 2:25). Genesis 2:25 provides a glimpse into the perfect community that the man and woman had together prior to the fall. It was lost, however, after the man and woman sinned. For the first time, they are ashamed as they stand before each other naked. They sew fig leaves together in a vain attempt to cover their exposure. Adam and Eve are now trying to hide from one another instead of living in community as God had commanded them. From this moment until Christ returns, community has been and will be affected by sin.

Not only do Adam and Eve try to hide from one another, but they also attempt to hide from God. For the first time in creation, "The man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (Gen 3:8). Now, Adam and Eve are separated from God by their sin, leading God to drive Adam and Eve out of the garden. Prior to this, the reader is given a foreshadowing of the gospel as God makes a sacrifice for the sins of the man and his wife and then covers their nakedness.

The breakdown of community does not end with the events of Adam and Eve. Genesis 4-11 records the spread of sin and the resulting separation that results from it

between man and God. The theme of community is predominant in these chapters. The murder of Abel by his brother Cain show that the family community is not spared from the effects of sin. God then creates a small remnant community—Noah and his family—to preserve after the flood. Genesis 11 shows humanity in an attempt to come together once more as a community. The purpose of their coming together at Babel was to declare their independence from God. God scatters humanity and confuses the languages so that sinful mankind would be unable to come together.

Genesis 12 records God's call to Abram. Abram being called by God is a clear step in the path to restoring the community that was lost between God and his people. The promise made by God centers around the construction of "a great nation" (12:2). God changes Abram's name to Abraham in Genesis 17 and says, "I have made you the father of a multitude of nations" (17:5). As revelation unfolds, Israel is the nation he has promised to make. God, in speaking of his relationship with Israel, says, "I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians" (Exod 6:7).

In Exodus, God is re-establishing community with the nation of Israel. The focus of the Exodus event is typically the act of deliverance itself; however, the emphasis within the book is on the community which the act of deliverance is leading to. William Dumbrell highlights this fact by discussing the amount of space the book of Exodus devotes to establishing the covenantal life of Israel, "More than one third of Exodus (chaps. 25-31; 35-40) is devoted to the establishment of Israel's cultic framework, in particular to the erection of, and the regulations for the use of, Israel's tabernacle. This is no meaningless cultic digression, but emphasizes the goal of the exodus and the importance of a worshipful response in Israel's continuing covenantal relationship."<sup>14</sup> Elmer Martens adds:

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<sup>14</sup>William Dumbrell, *The Faith of Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 32.

The pivotal text of Exodus 5:22-6:8 strikes down at once a notion that has surfaced every so often in church history. The erroneous notion is that deliverance, or salvation narrowly conceived, is the climax of God's action: for a people to be 'saved' is really all that matters. The aura about the mighty intervention of God in history need not be dimmed, but it must be emphasized that the initial act of deliverance is indeed initial. More is to follow. The salvation experience is a vestibule into the main auditorium of God's design. The vestibule, for all its charm and the reality it offers of being 'inside' the temple, and so in God's presence, is nevertheless intended to lead into the larger dimensions of experience with God. Deliverance is the vestibule to a community life, to continuing experience with God, to a rich quality of life. The community at which deliverance aims is a special kind of community, a covenant people under God, as depicted in the statement: 'I will take you as my people, and I will be your God' (Exod 6:7a).<sup>15</sup>

God's deliverance of Israel had community at its center. Modern readers tend to look at portions of the Pentateuch which describe the construction of the tabernacle and the entirety of Leviticus with its seemingly endless descriptions of sacrifices and ethical commands as tedious to read. Perhaps what is missing is seeing the centrality of the community which God is creating? What appear to be irrelevant details to many Christians today are intended by God to emphasize the significance of community for God's covenant people.

N. T. Wright, in his work *The New Testament and the People of God*, provides the following summation of Israelite belief;

There is one god, who made the entire universe, and this god is in covenant with Israel. He has chosen her for a purpose: she is to be the light of the world. Faced with national crisis (and the story of second-temple Judaism is, as we have seen, one of semi-permanent crisis), this twin belief, monotheism and election, committed any Jew who thought about it for a moment to a further belief: YHWH, as the creator and covenant god, was irrevocably committed to further action of some sort in history, which would bring about the end of Israel's desolation and the vindication of his true people. Monotheism and election lead to eschatology, and eschatology means the renewal of the covenant.<sup>16</sup>

Central to Israel's beliefs, according to Wright, is community. God had chosen

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<sup>15</sup>Elmer Martens, *God's Design: A Focus on Old Testament Theology* (N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 1998), 71.

<sup>16</sup>N.T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, vol. 1 of *Christian Origins and the Question of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992).

Israel as his people, and he had committed himself to them. So important to the Israelites is the idea of community, that Wright maintains that Israel's soteriology focused on the question, "what are the badges of membership that mark one out in the group that is to be saved, vindicated, raised to life (in the case of members already dead) or exalted to power (in the case of those still alive)?"<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Israelites did not view salvation as solely an individual reality, rather it was the individual as a part of the whole. They did not view themselves in isolation from the group, their salvation came as a result of being a part of the people whom God had chosen. As the Old Testament points to Christ and the new covenant, the emphasis on community is clear. "But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer 31:33).

The author of Hebrews points in chapter 8 to Christ as the fulfillment of the promise in Jeremiah: "Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises" (Heb 8:6). The promise in Jeremiah shows the continuity between the covenants and God's intention of making a covenant community of people who will worship him. Jesus has purchased that community (Matt 26:28). Wright also highlights the connection between the hope of Israel and Christian community, "What united early Christians, deeper than all diversity, was that they told, and lived, a form of Israel's story which reached its climax in Jesus and which then issued in their spirit-given new life and task."<sup>18</sup> The hope of Israel finds its culmination in Jesus Christ.

The importance of community is seen at the beginning of Jesus' earthly ministry as he forms a small group of followers. The first words that Mark records of Jesus are communal, as Jesus announces the arrival of the kingdom of God: "The time is

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 1:335.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., 1:456.

fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel” (1:15). As the kingdom advances in the world, Jesus is seen reversing the curse of sin as he heals the sick and forgives sins. Immediately after Jesus announces the coming of the kingdom of God he calls the first disciple to follow him. It is significant that the first action Jesus takes is to form a new community. The community that Jesus is forming in the first band of disciples is a glimpse of the community he came to give his life for, the church. The kingdom of God will be characterized by the community that will perfectly exist between God and his people and the people of God themselves.

D. J. Tidball highlights the communal nature of the kingdom of God seen within the Synoptic Gospels:

The kingdom of God is the sphere in which he reigns; it presupposes a community of people who have submitted to his rule and who act as both its agent and its sign. The kingdom is not abstract but it is embodied in the lives of people on earth. Its outworking necessarily takes place not only in the lives of individuals but also in the life of a group. So Jesus calls twelve disciples to be with him (Mark 3:13-19) and evidently has many other followers who assume a common identity (Luke 8:1-3; 10:1-24). He frequently uses communal language. His disciples are a family (Mark 10:29-31; Luke 8:19-21); a fraternity (Matt 23:8); a little flock (Luke 12:32); and a city (Matt 5:14).<sup>19</sup>

While Jesus’ earthly ministry was relatively brief, the majority of it was spent investing into the community of disciples which he had formed. He ate with them (Matt 9:9-13), he taught them (Matt 5-7), he trained them and sent them out for ministry (Matt 10:5-42), he made them a part of his most intimate moments (Matt 26:33-46), before ascending to heaven he called them to carry on his mission (Matt 28:18-20). The first band of disciples would be the prototype of community which the church in Acts will model.

After the events at Pentecost, the large group of new believers, along with the original group of disciples, are immediately drawn together and become a new community within Jerusalem. The results of the Holy Spirit filling the body are seen in

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<sup>19</sup> D. J. Tidball, “The Church,” in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2000), 409.

Acts 2:42, “And they devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Luke, the author of Acts, shows that one of the initial works the Holy Spirit does among these people is bring them together in community around the apostles teaching, fellowship, and worship.

Acts 2:46 gives insight into the meeting pattern of the early church. “And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts.” They met in large groups at the temple and smaller groups in the homes of various Christians. John Polhill comments on the distinctions between the temple meetings and those that took place in homes:

The Christian presence in the temple testifies not only to their remaining faithful to their Jewish heritage but also evidences their zeal for witness. In Jerusalem the temple was the primary place where crowds would be found, and there the Christians were to bear their witness (3:11-12; 5:21, 42). If the temple was the place of witness, homes were the place for fellowship. In the intimacy of the home setting, a common meal was shared together, probably including the Lord’s Supper as well. It was a time marked by rejoicing in their fellowship with one another and with the Spirit and by their own openness and sincerity.<sup>20</sup>

While these home meetings should not be considered the biblical equivalent of today’s small groups, they do provide evidence that the early church had a view of community which included the larger gathering of Christians supported by the smaller gathering of various groups of Christians. Both were necessary in their understanding of community as the church.

N. T. Wright provides the following insight into the community of the early Christians:

Baptism and eucharist . . . both draw the eye up to the most striking feature of the life of the early community: the worship of Jesus. . . . Such worship was not, certainly within the first Christian century, a sign that the community was moving away from creational or covenantal monotheism, but rather a sign of a radical reinterpretation within that monotheism. . . . The common life of the church,

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<sup>20</sup>John Polhill, *Acts, The New American Commentary*, vol. 26 (Nashville: Broadman, 1992), 121-22.



centered upon (though not of course limited to) this symbolic praxis and focus on Jesus, seems to have functioned from the first in terms of an alternative family.<sup>21</sup>

The community of early Christians viewed themselves as a family. This would be further developed in the epistles, particularly Paul's. In order to understand Paul's thought on community, his theology of fellowship must first be examined. George Ladd, concerning Paul's theology of fellowship, maintains, "This is something more than human fellowship or the pleasure people of like mind find in each other's presence. It is more than a fellowship in a common religion. It is an eschatological creation of the Holy Spirit. . . . This relationship exists between people because they share a common relationship to Christ (1 Cor 1:9)."<sup>22</sup> Peter O'Brien adds, "The NT emphasis is on the participation 'in something,' particularly objective realities outside and independent of one's existence, rather than the association 'with someone' which is the emphasis on the contemporary notion of 'fellowship'"<sup>23</sup>

Within the Pauline epistles, the apostle uses several images of the church. A prominent image found throughout Paul's letters is the church as "the body of Christ." Robert Fung points out the various references of the image in Scripture:

The Pauline writings use the exact phrase "the body of Christ" only four times (Rom 7:4; 1 Cor 10:16; Eph 4:12; 1 Cor 12:27). Equivalent expressions include "the body of the Lord" (1 Cor 11:27), "his body of flesh" (Col 1:22), "his glorious body" (Phil 3:12), "his body" (Eph 1:23; 5:30; Col 1:24) and "my body" (1 Cor 11:24). Closely related to the above are the terms "the body" (1 Cor 11:29; Eph 5:23; Col 1:18; 2:19) and "one body" (Rom 12:5; 1 Cor 10:17; 12:13; Eph 2:16; 4:4; Col 3:15).<sup>24</sup>

Peter T. O'Brien maintains that the phrase "can be used comprehensively of all

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<sup>21</sup>Wright, *New Testament and the People of God*, 1:448.

<sup>22</sup>George Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing, 2002), 588.

<sup>23</sup>Peter T. O'Brien, "Fellowship," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, ed. Gerald Hawthorne (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 294.

<sup>24</sup>Ronald Y. K. Fung, "The Body of Christ," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 76.

who are united in him, and also of a particular manifestation of that body.”<sup>25</sup> P. S.

Minear provides the following commentary on the meaning of the image;

This image is initially used to stress the dependence of members on one another in the face of tendencies, such as their differing gifts or their different cultural and social backgrounds, which might cause them to pull apart from one another. The key issue is the quality of relationships and mutual responsiveness that believers have with each other (Rom 12:3-8; 1 Cor 12:12-31). Commitment to one another was essential because they “were all baptized by one Spirit into one body” (1 Cor 12:13, NIV). The nature of their fellowship life is far more profound than when people gather because they merely have a common interest or wish to pursue a common goal.<sup>26</sup>

First Corinthians 12:12-31 is a well known passage in which Paul utilizes the “body of Christ” image. The issue of unity is addressed in 1 Corinthians 12:12, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ.” What unifies the body of Christ is Christ himself. New Testament scholar Tom Schreiner points out the connection between this verse and Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 concerning the Lord’s Supper: “The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.” Schreiner states that “the church is one body because it eats of the one loaf, Christ. The individual members of the church, in other words, are the body of Christ.”<sup>27</sup> Unity is not something the church strives to produce; rather it is a reality that the body of Christ has in Christ. The church must work to maintain its unity, however.

The members of the body which Paul speaks of are individual Christians. When do individual Christians become a part of the body of Christ? Paul indicates in 1

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<sup>25</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, “The Church,” in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, 128.

<sup>26</sup>P. S. Minear, “Church,” in *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*, ed. Leland Ryken, James C. Wilhoit, and Tremper Longman III (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity, 1998), 148.

<sup>27</sup>Thomas Schreiner, *Paul: Apostle of God’s Glory in Christ* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 2001), 336.

Corinthians 12:13 that at the moment of conversion the Christian becomes a part of the body of Christ: “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” The Holy Spirit’s work to which Paul is referring is the Spirit’s work of regeneration resulting in conversion. Paul declares that at the moment of conversion the Holy Spirit places the Christian in the body of Christ. An implication of the Holy Spirit joining the Christian to the body of Christ at the moment of conversion is that Christians are saved for community. They are joined to the universal body of Christ and are then to seek a local assembly of that body in order to be a part of community.

The Christian being saved for community is at the center of Paul’s thought in verses 14-16. Paul focuses attention on the various parts of the body, emphasizing its parts. Paul compares Christians to various body parts, such as feet, eyes, and hands. The parts of the body have no function if they are not connected to a physical body. As each part fulfills its duty there is community among the numerous parts of the body. Christians express this community within the context of a local congregation of like-minded believers. God’s purpose in this is to show that he “arranged the members of the body, each one of them, as he chose” (18). God gives to each individual Christian gifts, and they are to use them within the body of Christ (17-20). Christians should not be concerned about their position within the body (14-16). Instead, their concern should be serving the body as God has equipped them to.

Rooted in the image of the church as the body of Christ is the phrase “one another.” Paul uses the expression in 1 Corinthians 12:25 “that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another.” Paul makes the connection between the image of the church as the “body of Christ” and “one another” in Romans 12:4-5, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.” What is important to notice in this verse is

that Paul says the individual members of the body are members of one another. Just as the believers union with Christ is inseparable, so also is the union believers share with one another. Regarding Paul's use of the imagery of the church as a body, James Dunn provides the following observation:

Underlying the usage is Paul's recognition that acceptance of the gospel is bound to have a corporate expression. Though much of what Paul has so far argued could be reduced to an individualistic concept of salvation, it now becomes clear that Paul was simply assuming the inevitability of its communal character. The basic point was evidently noncontroversial: there was no need to develop a theological argument for it in the main body of the exposition (chaps 1-11).<sup>28</sup>

Dunn then provides the following insight about the phrase "members of one another" in verse 5, it "is a slightly odd variation of the body metaphor, but serves very effectively to bring out the degree of interdependence which Paul regards as the most important point to draw from the body imagery."<sup>29</sup> The inherent nature of community within the body of Christ is seen in the "one another" passages. The "one another" passages show that Christians are to never think of themselves in isolation from other Christians. Howard Snyder provides three functions of the "one another" passages:

First, most of these passages imply behaviors, not just attitudes. The New Testament writers are less concerned with how believers feel about each other than they are about their actions – their living together as community and publicly as disciples. Second, all the "one another" passages imply a social context – appropriate structures in which these behaviors can be lived out. In the New Testament, of course, the early church was essentially a network of home fellowships and this happened more naturally. Third, nearly all the "one another" passages are imperatives – instructions about actual behaviors, not reminders of abstract spiritual truths we can enjoy meditating upon.<sup>30</sup>

The Bible knows of no relationship with God that is in isolation from the community found in the body of Christ. While the individual Christian does have an

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<sup>28</sup>James Dunn, *Romans 9-16, Word Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 38b, ed. David Hubbard and Glenn Barker (Dallas: Word Books, 1988), 722.

<sup>29</sup>*Ibid.*, 724.

<sup>30</sup>Howard Snyder, "Authentic Fellowship: How do we learn the deep 'one another' community of Scripture without being in close proximity?" *Christianity Today*, October 2003, vol. 47, no. 10, 102.

intimate relationship with God as their Father, the “one another” passages demonstrate that relationship occurring within the body of Christ, as Christians provide care and encouragement for each other.

Throughout the New Testament the phrase is used sixty-five times speaking of the church concerning the interaction believers should have with one another as the body of Christ.<sup>31</sup> Paul uses the phrase more than any other New Testament author. There are forty-three occurrences of the phrase in Paul’s epistles. The only epistles of Paul not containing a “one another” passage are Philippians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Philemon.

What all of the passages have in common is that they seem to point to a smaller environment which provided the early Christians opportunities to care for one another that larger meetings did not. Such an environment is easy to imagine in light of the biblical data from the early chapters of Acts which show the early church gathering in what were likely house churches (Acts 2:46).

An example of such care is found in Colossians 3:13, “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other, as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.” The portrait of life which Paul is painting that should exist among the believers at Colossae is not one in which interaction is scarce. Instead, they were to be involved in one another’s lives to the degree that offending one another was possible and forgiveness could be extended. The forgiveness they were to extend was to mirror the forgiveness which they received from God in the gospel. The forgiveness of God reconciles and draws near. As they served in the close community that is the body of Christ, it was inevitable that one would offend another. Paul is instructing them to engage one another in a way that is akin to the engagement they have

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<sup>31</sup>John 13:35; 15:12; 15:17; Rom 12:5; 12:12; 12:16; 14:13; 15:5; 15:7; 15:14; 16:16; 1 Cor 4:6; 6:1; 6:7; 7:5; 11:33; 12:8; 12:25; 16:20; 2 Cor 13:11-12; Gal 5:13; 5:15; 5:26; 6:2; Eph 4:2; 4:25; 4:32; 5:19; 5:21; Col 3:9; 3:13; 3:16; 1 Thess 3:12; 4:9; 4:18; 5:11; 5:15; 2 Thess 1:3; Titus 3:3; Heb 3:13; 10:24-25; Jas 4:11; 5:9; 5:16; 1 Pet 1:22; 4:8-10; 5:5; 5:14; 1 John 1:7; 3:11; 3:23; 4:7; 4:11-12

with God through Christ. Such interaction and forgiveness would not be possible were these believers to only have gathered with the larger church. These Christians had to have engaged with one another so closely that when the opportunity for forgiving others arose, it could mirror the forgiveness received in the gospel.

Although authorship of Hebrews is uncertain, Hebrews 10:24-25 provides another example of believers in surroundings outside of a larger worship gathering. “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encourage one another and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” More is taking place in these verses than simply the Christians, attending corporate worship together. Stirring up and encouraging are things that take place in smaller circumstances, such as a house church, instead of the typical larger gathering. It was the task of these Christians to consider method’s with the desired goal of stirring up and encouraging other believers. He is not talking about being stirred up and encouraged by hearing a preached sermon, although sermons will have those results. The author of Hebrews calls them to “stir up one another.” F. F. Bruce writes the following concerning the language which the author of Hebrews is using:

The word “stimulate is a strong one; it appears in one other place in the New Testament and there in a very different way, of the “sharp contention” that broke out between Paul and Barnabas when they could not agree on taking Mark with them on a second apostolic visit to Cyprus and South Galatia (Acts 15:39). Perhaps this Greek word *paroxysmos*, like our English “provocation,” is more commonly used in the unfavorable sense of irritation than in the more pleasant sense used here by our author. It is the former sense that Paul has in mind in 1 Cor 13:5 when, using the cognate verb *paroxyno*, he says that love “is not provoked.” But here love *is* provoked in the sense of being stimulated in the lives of Christians by the considerateness and example of other members of their fellowship. This will never happen, however, if they keep one another at a distance.<sup>32</sup>

The Christians who were the original recipients of Hebrews were to actively be stirring each other up and encouraging one another to continued faithfulness. Verse 25

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<sup>32</sup>F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 256-57, emphasis original.

serves as a subtle warning for Christians not to neglect the provocation which the author of Hebrews is calling them towards. The verse begins with the warning to not neglect meeting together with other believers. What is the danger of neglecting meeting together? The understanding gathered from the context is that those who are not gathering together are not being stirred up toward love and good works and are not being encouraged to faithfulness. True biblical community must include Christians interacting with one another in a manner that stimulates their Christian development and maturity. While these verses do underscore the necessity for Christians to attend larger worship gatherings, they also demonstrate the essential nature for every Christian to be in an environment where they can be stirred up and where they can provoke other Christians toward greater faithfulness.

The “one another” passages serve as a template for how biblical community should look. Christians should, to provide a few examples, encourage one another toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24-25), bear one another’s burdens (Gal 6:2), exhibit patience with one another (Eph 4:2), forgive one another (Col 3:13), and speak truth to one another (Col 3:16). Community of this magnitude has been God’s intention since creation. Although community is currently distorted due to the fall, those churches that experience a taste of it, serve to point to its restoration in the new heavens and the new earth. John wrote, “And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God” (Rev 21:3). The flow of redemptive history has been anticipating the moment which John describes. Dennis Johnson declares:

The intimacy with God that made Eden truly paradise, the garden of God, was lost through human sin. The tabernacle of God in the midst of Israel’s wilderness camp picked up motifs from that lost home, in the fruit-tree patterns of its curtains and the towering cherubim guarding its inmost sanctuary. Yet both tabernacle and temple in the Old Testament times were faint previews of the eventual, eternal dwelling of God among his people. God’s presence marks the consummation of an intimate

covenant commitment, often expressed in the Old Testament in words such as, “My dwelling place also will be with them; and I will be their God, and they will be My people (Ezek 37:27; cf. Lev 26:12), which are echoed here.<sup>33</sup>

The Bible shows the close of redemptive history as being the recreation of community which God intended in the garden. God reverses everything which came into creation as a result of the curse. The isolation that resulted from humanity’s rebellion is replaced with intimacy. The scene depicted in Revelation 21:3 is not to be understood as simply a restoration of the community which existed between God and man prior to the fall. God removes any possibility of the community between he and his people from being severed. Revelation 19:11-21 shows Jesus as the victorious rider on a white horse. He defeats Satan and casts him into the lake of fire for eternity. The serpent in the garden is defeated (Gen 3:15; Rom 16:20). Because Jesus is victorious over the serpent and sin, that which marred community in the garden is not present in the new heavens and new earth.

### **The Role of Community in Progressive Sanctification**

Theologian Wayne Grudem defines sanctification as “a progressive work of God and man that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our actual lives.”<sup>34</sup> Paul provides insight on the process of sanctification in 2 Corinthians 3:18: “And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” The language of “one degree of glory to another” speaks to the process of sanctification. Paul leaves the reader with no reason to believe that the process of sanctification will be completed in this life. Some Holiness and Pentecostal denomination teach what is sometimes referred to as “entire sanctification” or “perfectionism”. The teaching was popularized by John Wesley.

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<sup>33</sup>Dennis Johnson, *Triumph of the Lamb. A Commentary on Revelation* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2001), 304-05.

<sup>34</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 746.



Robert Rakestraw provides the following explanation of Wesley's view of entire sanctification:

The heart of Wesley's theology of sanctifying grace is his doctrine of Christian perfection, which he describes as "the grand depositum which God has lodged with the people called Methodists; . . . for the sake of propagating this chiefly He appeared to have raised us up." Wesley defines Christian perfection as "the loving God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength. This implies, that no wrong temper, none contrary to love, remains in the soul; and that all the thoughts, words, and actions, are governed by pure love." Such perfection does not exclude human infirmities, ignorance and mistakes. "A man may be filled with pure love, and still be liable to mistake . . . I believe this to be a natural consequence of the soul's dwelling in flesh and blood."<sup>35</sup>

The possibility of being free from all "wrong temper" remaining "in the soul" in this life is a promise Scripture doesn't provide. The struggle with sin that Paul explained in Romans 7:15-25 would not end until Paul was delivered from the "body of death" (7:24) that he had in this present evil age. Romans 7:25 indicates that the believers struggle with sin will not end until Jesus delivers them from their current earthly body.

It also should be noted from Grudem's definition of sanctification that both God and man have a role in the process. Theologian William Shedd, commenting on the relationship between God's sovereignty and human responsibility in sanctification, says, "The believer cooperates with God the Spirit in the use of the means of sanctification. Sanctification is both a grace and a duty."<sup>36</sup> The means of sanctification would be spiritual disciplines which the believer is to regularly use to grow in godliness. One of the means of sanctification is the community of saints. Grudem points out this fact by affirming, "Sanctification is usually a corporate process in the New Testament. It is something that happens in community."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>Robert Rakestraw, "John Wesley as a Theologian of Grace," *JETS* 27 (1984): 193-203.

<sup>36</sup>William G. T. Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 2003), 804.

<sup>37</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 756.

Paul elaborates on the believers union with Christ and the resulting union with the body of Christ in Ephesians 2:14-22:

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit.

Paul notes that Jesus created “one new man” (Eph 2:15). Paul Tripp and Tim Lane provide the following insight into Paul’s words:

It is impossible to read this passage and come away with the idea that Christianity is a “just-me-and-God” religion. Have you ever heard someone say ‘Yes, I am a Christian, but I don’t go to church. Why do I need that when I have the Lord?’ Or, ‘What is most important is my personal devotion to Christ, not the church.’ The Bible never separates the two. Our salvation connects us to God and his people. It is not an either-or but a both-and arrangement. It is not just in heaven that we will be united around the throne of God. Our personal relationship with Christ unites us to believers now!<sup>38</sup>

While sanctification does happen in the life of the individual, God intends for the process of sanctification to occur in the body of Christ. God himself is the author of community as he exists in Trinity. As God’s people, Christians are to view themselves primarily through the lens of the body of Christ. Speaking of the corporate emphasis in Scripture, Bruce Milne states:

The Christian life is inescapably corporate. Teaching on Christian holiness has frequently concentrated almost exclusively on the ‘holy man’ or the ‘holy woman’, to the neglect of the biblical concern for ‘the holy people’ or the ‘holy church.’ The ideal of the ‘omnicompetent Christian individual,’ able to meet every spiritual challenge and live a life of unbroken victory over sin and the devil, has undoubtedly produced remarkable examples of Christian character; but, as every Christian

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<sup>38</sup>Timothy S. Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change* (Winston-Salem, NC: Punch Press, 2006), 81-82.

counselor knows, this emphasis has driven many to a lonely struggle ending in despair and disillusionment, or, worse, in the hypocrisy of a double-standard life.

This whole approach needs re-examination. The bulk of New Testament teaching on the Christian life, including the major sections on holiness, occur in letters addressed to corporate groups, to churches. All the major exhortations to holy living are plural – ‘we,’ ‘you’ (Ro 6:1-23; Gal 5:13-6:10; Eph 4:17-6:18) . . . Similarly all the New Testament promises of victory are corporate ( 1 Co 15:57; 1 Jn 5:4; Rev 15:2). In other words the apostles envisaged the Christian life and Christian sanctification in the context of a loving, caring, fellowship.<sup>39</sup>

Hebrews 3:12-13 provides an example of believers stirring one another up.

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Prior to these verses, the author recounts the rebellion of the Israelites under Moses which resulted in failure to enter the promised-land. The Israelites failed to enter the promised-land because of unbelief. The author of Hebrews is urging these believers to make sure their hearts are not succumbed by the same unbelief. Christians were to exhort each other everyday so that their hearts would not become hardened by sin. F. F. Bruce provides good insight on the communal emphasis in this passage:

The exhortation to mutual encouragement was wise: in isolation from fellow-believers each individual among them was more liable to succumb to the subtle temptations which pressed in from so many sides, but if they came together regularly for mutual encouragement the devotion of all would be kept warm and their common hope would be in less danger of flickering and dying. In isolation each was prone to be impressed by the specious arguments which underlined the worldly wisdom of a certain measure of compromise of their Christian faith and witness; in the healthy atmosphere of the Christian fellowship these arguments would be the more readily appraised at their true worth, and recognized as being so many manifestations of ‘the deceitfulness of sin.’ Where the right path lies clear before the eyes, a disinclination to follow it can be reinforced in the mind by many beguiling lines of rationalization; but to surrender to them results in a hardening of the heart, a reduced sensitivity of conscience, which makes it more difficult to recognize the right path on a subsequent occasion. But in a fellowship which exercised a watchful and unremitting care for its members the temptation to prefer

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<sup>39</sup>C. J. Mahaney, ed., *Why Small Groups* (Gaithersburg, MD: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1996), 5-6.

the easy course to the right one would be greatly weakened, and the united resolution to stand firm would be correspondingly strengthened.<sup>40</sup>

The fellowship among these believers was to have a negative and positive element. Negatively, they were to watch the hearts of other believers to ensure they are not hardened by sin. Positively, they were to encourage each other to faithfulness. The question Cain asked in Genesis 4, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (4:9), is answered in Hebrews 3. Christians are responsible for others in the body of Christ. The fruit of the gospel in the church universal and local should be a watch-care mentality. The individual Christian is not able to adequately know the true state of their heart. Therefore, the care that true biblical community provides is essential for the individual Christians sanctification. Such care is seen in the connection between verses 12 and 13. The warning contained in verse 12 is for individual believers to make sure they do not have an unbelieving heart. Instead of providing instruction for how Christians are to follow that command individually, the author’s direction is simply to “exhort one another” (Heb 3:13).

What were these believers to exhort each other with? Verse 14 answers the question, “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” These Christians were to exhort one another to maintain their confidence in the gospel. When Christians gather together, they are to be strategic in their conversations, pointing one another to the gospel. The gospel is the means to true fellowship. If fellowship centers around their participation in the objective realities of the gospel, then as Christians encourage each other with those realities they are experiencing genuine fellowship.

The apostle James provides another example of the role community plays in progressive sanctification as he deals with conflict among the body of Christ. “What causes quarrels and fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within

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<sup>40</sup>Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews*, 100-01.

you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions” (James 4:1-3).

Jesus spoke clearly in Luke 6 that words come from our hearts (Luke 6:45). James views the conflict among these believers as revealing their passions, or their hearts. Their quarreling words are the fruit of sinful desires within their hearts. Indwelling sin in the lives of the individuals James is speaking to is being revealed by the people involved in the conflict. Thus, community serves to reveal indwelling sin in the believer that otherwise would go unnoticed were it not for the believing community around them. As Christians interact with one another, sinful tendencies are inevitably revealed. The sinful tendencies that can occur among Christians in community explain why much of the “one another” language deals with forgiving other believers who have sinned against us. Paul acknowledges the inevitability of conflict among Christians in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you”. Earlier in the same chapter of Ephesians, Paul calls them to walk in a manner worthy of their calling as the people of God, and instructs them to bear “with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:2-3).

Viewing Christianity through an individualistic lens of “my relationship with God,” does not conform to God’s revealed plan of being involved in relationships which are a means of progressive sanctification. Tim Lane and Paul Tripp speak to God’s purpose in these relationships:

Close relationships make it more likely that you will sin against someone or that someone will sin against you. There will need to be times of confession and forgiveness. There will be times when you will need to serve someone, even though you feel you lack the resources. There will also be times when you will be served! That may not sound like a challenge, but if you are proud, it is the last thing you want!

These are the very reasons why community is such a big part of God’s plan to transform us into the image of Christ. Living in community pushes us to die to

ourselves. There will be times when loving others and allowing others to serve and love us will feel like death, this is the pathway to real life in Christ. The more we understand our own hearts, the more we see that it takes a work of God's grace to transform self-absorbed individuals into a community of love. Being in redemptive relationships shows us our need for change and helps bring it about!<sup>41</sup>

Any discussion about progressive sanctification will necessarily include obedience. Many of the repeated New Testament calls towards obedience to Christ are addressed to congregations rather than individuals. While the individual believer should apply passages that urge Christians to obedience to their own lives, they must also not miss the corporate nature of those same verses. An example is Romans 12:1, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship." Paul is not simply calling individual believers to present themselves as a living sacrifice. His language is plural, "bodies." The congregation is to collectively present themselves as a living sacrifice. Individual believers cannot present themselves as living sacrifices apart from the body of Christ.

Galatians 5:16-24 is a popular passage that contrasts the fruits of the flesh with the fruits of the Spirit. The passage comes in the context of several uses of the phrase "one another." As Paul talks about the freedom Christians have because of the gospel, he instructs them to use their freedom to serve "one another" (Gal 5:13-15). The Spirit's fruit will be displayed through the believer's life in numerous settings. The chief setting appears to be within the body of Christ, however Paul ends the passage with, "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking one another, envying one another" (5:25-26).

The Christian faith is deeply and unalterably communal. Paul's words found in Ephesians 2:15-16 show discipleship occurring in community. Paul speaks of Jesus' intention of creating one body: ". . . That he might create in himself one new man in

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<sup>41</sup>Lane and Tripp, *How People Change*, 83.

place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.” The goal of redemption was to create a new body, not disconnected individuals. Sanctification will have an individual focus, but it should not be pursued apart from the corporate reality of the new people of God.

### **Conclusion**

When one examines the totality of Scripture, the theme of community becomes clear. Beginning with God revealing himself as Trinity, followed by his declaration, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Gen 2:18), culminating in the celebrative announcement in the new heavens and the new earth, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.” (Rev 21:3). Any thinking about effective small group ministry must be built upon the theology of community revealed in Scripture.

## CHAPTER 3

### CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP LEADERS

The definition for small groups used in this project is taken from Jeffrey Arnold's *The Big Book of Small Groups*, where he states that a small group is "intent on participating with Christ in building his ever-expanding kingdom in the hearts of individuals, in the life of the group and, through believers, into the world."<sup>1</sup> Small groups that seek to build the kingdom of God as described in the definition need effective leaders. The purpose of this chapter is to provide characteristics for effective small group leaders.

#### **A Growing Relationship with Christ**

Small group leaders will not be effective apart from a growing relationship with Christ. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, in their book *Building a Church of Small Groups*, underscore the significance of this characteristic by saying, "The greatest gift a leader can give a small group are a relationship with Christ and the passion to become more like him."<sup>2</sup>

Spiritual leadership is unlike any other type of leadership. Leaders are typically thought of as confident individuals who lean heavily on their own strengths and resources in order to take the organization they lead to the next level. In order for

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<sup>1</sup>Jeffrey Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter Varsity Press, 2004), 23.

<sup>2</sup>Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *Building a Church of Small Groups* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 124.



spiritual leaders such as pastors or small group leaders to take their churches or groups to the next level, they must rely on the strength and resources of God by the Holy Spirit.

This is the clear emphasis of the book of Acts. Prior to his ascension, Jesus told the apostles “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea, Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (1:8). At Pentecost, disciples that had formally been afraid are now bold and preaching with power. Three-thousand are added to the church that day, as a result of the coming of the Spirit (2:41). It is the Holy Spirit who fills Peter to preach before the Jewish Council (4:8). When Peter and John are released, the Christians gather together and pray for continued boldness in the face of opposition and the text says they were “filled with the Holy Spirit” (4:31). Prior to being killed, Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit (7:55). Philip is told by the Holy Spirit to approach the Ethiopian eunuch in order that he would help the man have a proper understanding of Isaiah 53:7-8 (8:29). The Holy Spirit falls upon the Gentiles, making Peter’s preaching effectual (10:44-45). Barnabas and Saul were set apart and sent on their first missionary journey by the Holy Spirit (13:3-4).

The advancement of the gospel and the growth of the church in Acts took place because of the work of the Holy Spirit through the early church. Malcolm Yarnell points out, “The Spirit is the agent of the Christian life as seen in Luke’s language concerning the filling of the Spirit, guidance by the Spirit, and wonders and signs.”<sup>3</sup>

The same is true today. Effective small group leaders must be dependent on the Holy Spirit and not themselves. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson make the following comment:

Only a leader with Spirit-led passion can create the proper ministry atmosphere. This passion results from hours spent in prayer, solitude, and other spiritual

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<sup>3</sup>Daniel Akin, ed., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Academic, 2007), 617.

practices to discern the Spirit's guidance. You want a leader who relies on the Holy Spirit and believes God can work through any crisis. In looking for a leader with the tactical and strategic ability to build community in your church, remember that your goal is not to create a slick, impressive organization. Rather is it to see the central theme of John 17 become a reality – that the church would become one. . . . To make this vision come alive for your church, someone – a Spirit-led leader – will need to model a strong spiritual life and create an environment in which dependence on the Holy Spirit is normal.<sup>4</sup>

How is the leader to cultivate such a dependence upon the Holy Spirit? The answer to this question is in the discovery of what the Spirit has come to do. Jesus discuss' the work of the Holy Spirit in John 13-16. Jesus tells the disciples, "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth, for he will not speak on his own authority but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. He will glorify me, for he will take what is mine and declare it to you." (John 16:13-14).

The immediate context of this promise concerns the apostles, as the Holy Spirit inspired them to remember the words and actions of Jesus recorded in the Gospels and further revelation as found in the remaining letters of the New Testament. Sinclair Ferguson comments on the application for Christians today:

No doubt these words have a continuing significance for Christians today, but not in the direct way in which they are often understood (the Spirit will lead me into all truth in an unmediated way). Rather, they indicate that it is by means of the apostolic witness (now, inscripturated in the New Testament), not by direct revelation of the Spirit to individual believers or by corporate revelation to teaching officers (the claim which was to be developed in the Roman Catholic magisterium), that Christ's person, his teaching and his future purposes are made known.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 70-71.

<sup>5</sup>Sinclair Ferguson, *The Holy Spirit*, *Contours of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove: Ill, InterVarsity Press, 1996), 70-71.

The Holy Spirit does not act independently from Christ. He directs Christians to the person and work of Christ. Therefore, in order for small group leaders to cultivate a dependence on the Holy Spirit they must cultivate a growing relationship with Jesus Christ. The task of leading a small group will prove to be too large for the leader to rely on his or her innate abilities. If leaders desire to see true gospel growth and transformation in their groups, they will need to rely on the power of the Holy Spirit.

In order for leaders to develop a growing relationship with Christ and a daily reliance upon the power of the Holy Spirit, they need to be consistent in spiritual disciplines. Mark Mullery, discussing the importance of spiritual disciplines in the life of a small group leader states:

A leader must already be what he calls others to become. If he is calling others onward and upward in God, he must also be pressing ahead himself. Consistently practicing the spiritual disciplines not only helps make the leader a worthy model for others, it provides fuel for his own fire. How will he bring truth to his group if he isn't immersing himself daily in the only book that faithfully contains God's revelation of truth to man? With what will he feed his group if he hasn't been with God? How can he sense the leading of the Holy Spirit if he isn't cultivating a relationship with the person of the Holy Spirit? If his soul is not refreshed, how will he refresh others? And what else will refresh his soul but time in the presence of his Maker?<sup>6</sup>

The characteristic of a growing relationship with Christ is critical because it will be the fountain from which all other characteristics of a small group leader flow. The effectiveness of the leader and the impact he or she will have on their group is entirely dependent upon this first characteristic.

### **Equipped Leaders**

Paul, in Ephesians 4:11-12 says, "And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for the building up of the body of Christ." It is not God's intention for only a segment of his

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<sup>6</sup>C.J. Mahaney, ed., *Why Small Groups?* (Gaithersburg: Sovereign Grace Ministries, 1996), 53.

body to be involved in ministry. God desires that the entire body of Christ be involved in ministry, in order that the body of Christ would be built up. He goes on to say that when each part of the body is fulfilling its God intended purpose it “makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph 4:16).

Ephesians 4:12 indicates that it is the role of the leaders within each local congregation to equip believers for ministry. Peter O’Brien, commenting on Paul’s call to equip the saints says:

The notion of equipping or preparing, in the sense of making someone adequate or sufficient for something, best suits the context. However, it does require an object: people are prepared for some purpose. That purpose is ‘for the work of ministry’, an activity of the saints for which the leaders are to prepare and equip them. Christ has given ‘special’ ministers so that they will ‘make God’s people fully qualified’, thus enabling them to serve their Lord by serving one another. . . . ‘The ministry of the officials does not find its fulfillment in their own existence but only in the activity of preparing others to minister.’ The ministry mentioned in v. 11 fulfills an important role in the Lord’s purposes: it is pioneering in nature, since it leads the way in serving the Lord’s people (i.e., the ‘saints’; see on 1:1, 15) and in equipping them for their own ministry.<sup>7</sup>

Equipping the saints for ministry entails equipping them for a specific ministry task. A mistake that church’s can make is simply allowing an individual to lead a small group and assume that he or she will lead the group biblically and in the proper direction. However, this assumption is dangerous. The church cannot take for granted whether their small group leaders have a proper grasp of the statement of faith their particular church believes, along with the ability to articulate those theological beliefs. Neither can a church hope their small group leaders will lead their particular group in the same direction the church as a whole is moving.

Therefore, in order for church’s to have equipped small group leaders, they need to equip their leaders in two areas: a proper theological training and a proper

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<sup>7</sup>Peter T. O’Brien, *Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1999), 303-04.

understanding of the role small groups have within the larger vision of the entire church. The importance of proper doctrinal teaching is seen in Paul's words found in Colossians 1:28, "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ." Maturity in Christ only comes through being taught certain truths. Colin Marshall comments on the significance of orthodox teaching within small groups, "Imparting right knowledge and understanding is central to Christian groups. Receiving Christ means being taught something; it is about learning and understanding and wisdom and knowledge. Salvation and godly living depends on these things, and they are only to be found in Christ."<sup>8</sup>

There are some today that want to downplay the significance of theological training within the church. Frank Viola and George Barna, in their book, *Pagan Christianity*, state:

Contemporary theological teaching is data-transfer education. It moves from notebook to notebook. In the process, our theology rarely gets below the neck. If a student accurately parrots the ideas of his professor, he is awarded a degree. And that means a lot in a day when many Christians obsess over (and sometimes deify) theological degrees in their analysis of who is qualified to minister.

Theological knowledge, however, does not prepare a person for ministry. This does not mean that the knowledge of the world, church history, theology, philosophy, and the Scriptures is without value. Such knowledge can be very useful. But it is not central. Theological competence and a high-voltage intellect alone do not qualify a person to serve in God's house.<sup>9</sup>

While it is true that merely having theological knowledge does not prepare an individual for ministry, theological knowledge is central. If this were not true, why does Paul spend such a large amount of his letters teaching those he is addressing theology? If the small group leader hopes to impact the heart, they must first penetrate the mind because the mind and the heart are inseparable. The connection between the mind and

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<sup>8</sup>Colin Marshall, *Growth Groups* (Kingsford: Australia, 1995), 13.

<sup>9</sup>Frank Viola and George Barna, *Pagan Christianity* (Carol Stream, IL: 2008), 216.

the heart is seen in Romans 12:1-2, “I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to the world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Paul sees the mind playing a critical role when it comes to transformation. Therefore, if transformation is genuinely going to occur in a small group, the leader needs to teach the truth of Scripture. This does not mean that only individuals who have a seminary education are able to lead a small group. Pastors and church leaders will need to equip small group leaders in being familiar with the churches statement of faith and provide other theological resources to teachers that will be relevant to topics they are currently teaching.

Small Group Leaders also need to be equipped with the knowledge of how small groups fit into the overall vision of the church. Apart from this knowledge, the group leader will not have a clear end in mind when it comes to where the group is going. Bill Donahue and Russ Robinson discuss the toll a lack of vision has on small groups:

In the excitement of starting groups, these churches might have great discussions about ministry models, group types, and spiritual formation objectives. But they never actually decide on the purpose of small groups or define how small groups will fit into church life. Inevitably these small groups’ efforts reach an impasse. Church leaders who influence the congregation’s strategic direction say the road to ministry progress seems blocked. Small group members, leaders, and coaches feel confused, angry, or indifferent about their groups’ role in the church.<sup>10</sup>

The church needs to clarify what role small groups will play within the overall church. Equipped leaders will be able to properly lead their group in fulfilling a particular churches mission as they understand their place within the mission.

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<sup>10</sup>Bill Donahue, Russ Robinson, *The Seven Deadly Sins of Small Group Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 18.

## A Biblical Understanding of the Church

Mark Dever defines the church as “the body of people called by God’s grace through faith in Christ to glorify him together by serving him in his world.”<sup>11</sup> Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears give the following definition of a local church:

The local church is a community of regenerated believers who confess Jesus Christ as Lord. In obedience to Scripture they organize under qualified leadership, gather regularly for preaching and worship, observe the biblical sacraments of baptism and Communion, are unified by the Spirit, are disciplined for holiness, and scatter to fulfill the Great Commandment and the Great Commission as missionaries to the world for God’s glory and their joy.<sup>12</sup>

Christians are a part of the larger body of Christ. Christians are to view themselves in relation to the other members of the body of Christ. The apostle John reveals the connection between faith in Christ and fellowship with other Christians when he declares, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.” (1 Jhn 1:7) In other words, if an individual is truly walking in the light they will have fellowship with other Christians. Fellowship with other believers serves as visible evidence whether someone has truly been cleansed by the blood of Jesus from their sin.

Mark Noll comments on the shift in focus from the church to the individual, “Up to the early 1700’s, British Protestants preached on God’s plan for the church. From the mid-1700’s, however, evangelicals emphasized God’s plan for the individual.”<sup>13</sup> Driscoll and Breshears provide further insight into the focus on the individual at the expense of the church:

After Rene Descartes began his defense of God with the word *I*, one of the great hallmarks of the modern era was its radical commitment to the individual. While

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<sup>11</sup>Daniel Akin, ed., *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2007), 768.

<sup>12</sup>Mark Driscoll and Gerry Breshears, *Vintage Church* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2008), 38.

<sup>13</sup>Quoted from, *Ibid.*, 50.

not a concept in either the Old or New Testament, the idea that people stand alone as isolated individuals wove its way into the modern era, especially the American consciousness where the rugged individual is the hero in virtually all of our great cultural narratives. As a result, during the modern era the focus shifted from the church to the individual.<sup>14</sup>

The Bible does not negate the idea of an individual salvation and faith. Mankind, individually, has sinned and each person must repent and trust in the gospel. However, the focus should not be on a Christian experience that centers solely on the person apart from the natural movement toward biblical community.

The leader of a small group who sees the centrality of community in the Scriptures will lead the group to view themselves as connected to others around them who trust in the gospel and are a part of their local congregation. Therefore, the church is not optional for Christians, it is essential. Such a vision will cause the leader to seek to impart a vision of the Christian life where no aspect is done apart from the community of the saints.

A biblical understanding of the church will also provide the group leader with a proper view of themselves as under the spiritual authority of the leaders in the particular congregation they serve. The author of Hebrews discusses the spiritual authority of elders and leaders in a local congregation and how members in the congregation should regard them, “Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.” (Heb 13:17) Phil Newton gives insight into the words obey and submit:

Spiritual leaders bear responsibility for speaking the Word of God to the congregation and giving it an example to follow. In this context we can see the need to obey and submit. Obey carries the idea of obediently following someone because you trust that person. The implication is that the church hears the elders’ teaching of the Word and sees their seriousness in following the teaching of

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., 50.



Scripture, so they obediently do likewise. . . . Submit recognizes the God-ordained authority established in the church for order and direction. The congregation submits or places itself under the leadership of its spiritual leaders, complying with their direction and teaching.<sup>15</sup>

Leaders who view themselves as under the authority of the spiritual leaders in a congregation will submit to the vision for the church from the elders or pastors. Rather than having a vision for the particular group they lead that is out of bounds with the vision of the congregation, they will submit and follow the vision presented by the leaders of that church. Mark Mullery notes:

The Greek verb ‘to submit’ is a combination of two words. One means ‘under’ and the other means ‘to put someone or something in charge.’ Thus, the leader who wishes to be effective must understand both authority and submission – he must acknowledge that being in authority depends on his willingness to be under authority. As a citizen he is ‘under’ the governing authorities (Rom 13:1); as a Christian he is ‘under’ God’s authority (Jas 4:7); as a church member he is ‘under’ the authority his church leaders (1 Co 16:16); if a husband he is ‘over’ his children (Eph 6:1); at work he may be ‘over’ certain employees (Eph 6:5). Jesus marveled at the faith of the centurion who, because he understood himself as a man both in authority and under authority, was actively yielded to the authority of Christ.<sup>16</sup>

Colin Marshall provides insight on the importance of small group leaders viewing themselves under the spiritual authority of the church’s leadership:

Small group ministry has become a lay movement, responding to perceived deficiencies in the churches. It can be a way for the laity to take power for themselves in completion with congregational pastors. Some parts of the small groups movement are avowedly ‘anti-clerical’. It is right to see the limitations of only having the professionals do the work of ministry. Small groups are a superb way for every Christian to get involved in ministry. However, this must not be an expression of mutiny, rejecting the authority of recognized, trained, Bible-teaching pastors.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Phil Newton, *Elders in Congregational Life* (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 2005), 91.

<sup>16</sup>Mahaney, *Why Small Groups?*, 51-52.

<sup>17</sup>Marshall, *Growth Groups*, 30.

### **A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel**

At the heart of Christianity is the gospel. The gospel is the news that God, through the finished work of Christ, has provided the way for sinful humanity to be saved from their sin. In his epistle to the church at Rome, Paul writes, “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith” (Rom 3:23-25). It must not be assumed that small group leaders know the gospel. It is possible that the leader has yet to seriously consider the nature of God’s holiness and the nature of humanities depravity. This could result in the leader teaching a ‘gospel’ of good works, which reduces sin and lacks a true biblical call for repentance.

In order for small groups to truly be a part of building the kingdom of God, then the gospel must be central. Several aspects of the gospel should be highlighted, such as the character of God, the sinfulness of man, the work of Christ in his life, death, and resurrection, and the resulting effects of his work once received by faith. God reveals himself as the creator of all things, including humanity (Gen 1-2), he also reveals himself to be holy. Upon being in the presence of a holy God, the prophet Isaiah responds, “Woe is me! For I am lost” (Isa 6:5). Due to God’s holy character and the sinfulness of mankind, there is no possibility for humanity to save itself (Rom 3:20). Wayne Grudem defines sin as “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.”<sup>18</sup> God must judge sin (Rom 6:23), his wrath is against those who have sinned against him (Rom 1:18-32). Therefore, if salvation from sin is going to be offered, sin must sufficiently be paid for and the wrath of God fully satisfied. This explains why it is Christ alone who could pay for sin. John Murray provides insight on the necessity of Christ’s finished work in relation to the reality of sin:

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<sup>18</sup>Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 490.

It is this inviolable sanctity of God's law, the immutable dictate of holiness and the unflinching demand of justice, that makes mandatory the conclusion that salvation from sin without expiation and propitiation is inconceivable. It is this principle that explains the sacrifice of the Lord of glory, the agony of Gethsemane, and the abandonment of the accursed tree. It is this principle that undergirds the great truth that God is just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus. For in the work of Christ the dictates of holiness and the demands of justice have been fully vindicated. God set him forth to be a propitiation to declare his righteousness.<sup>19</sup>

Jesus, being "put forward as a propitiation" by God (Rom 3:25) entails God the Father pouring the entirety of his wrath against sin on Jesus. Jesus takes on himself the wrath of God on the cross, thereby guaranteeing those who repent of their sin and having faith in him will never endure the wrath of God. Paul proclaims that "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom 8:1).

There is no condemnation because in Christ, the believer is now justified. Paul speaks to the new status before God an individual has as a result of being justified, "Since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom 5:1). Tom Schreiner provides the following definition of justification:

Justification refers to God's verdict of not guilty on the day of judgment (Rom 2:13). God's eschatological verdict has now been announced in advance for those who believe in Jesus Christ. Those who have been justified by the blood of Christ will be saved from God's wrath at the eschaton (Rom 5:9). God will announce publicly to the world the verdict of not guilty on the last day, though this verdict already stands for those who belong to Christ Jesus. The forensic and legal character of the term 'justify' derives from the verbal form *sdq* in the OT. Judges are to declare the righteous innocent and condemn the wicked (Deut 25:1; 2 Sam 15:4; 1 Kings 8:31-32:2; 2 Chron 6:23; Prov 17:15; Isa 5:23). Judges do not 'make' anyone righteous. They pronounce on what is in fact the case – if they are righteous judges. In other words, the verbal form belongs in the forensic realm. For example, God will pass judgment on whether Paul is acquitted before the Lord on judgment day (1 Cor 4:4). When Paul says that the doers of the law will be justified (Rom 2:13), a declaration of righteousness is intended. God will pass judgment as to whether people are righteous, whether they have done what is right and good. The uniqueness of the Pauline gospel surfaces in the truth that God declares those who

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<sup>19</sup>John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1955), 18.

are sinners to be in the right before him if they trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation..<sup>20</sup>

Justification is a critical aspect of the gospel to be understood by the small group leader if they are to teach the true biblical gospel. Apart from an understanding of justification, the Christian may believe a form of legalism, which causes them to believe works they do contribute to their right standing before God. In the act of justification, the individual is declared righteous by the Father through the finished work of Jesus.

Flowing from an understanding of justification should be progressive sanctification. Schreiner notes:

Sanctification usually refers to the definitive work by which God has set apart believers in the realm of the holy in Christ Jesus. This eschatological work is accomplished at conversion, so that believers can be said to be holy or sanctified in God's presence. Still, Paul recognizes the need for growth in holiness and that transformation is a process (2 Cor 3:18), since complete sanctification and holiness will not be granted until Christ returns. Believers are already holy in Christ, and yet the fullness of that holiness will not be theirs until the day of redemption.<sup>21</sup>

God's desire for his people to be fully holy will be accomplished (Rom 8:29-30). However, in this age, sanctification will be experienced by degrees in the life of the Christian. Charles Finney, on the other hand, believed and taught that entire sanctification was possible to attain in this age. Finney argued that entire sanctification was possible in this life on two grounds:

1. It is self-evident that entire obedience to God's law is possible on the ground of natural ability. To deny this, is to deny that a man is able to do as well as he can. . . . 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength' (Deut 6:5). Here then it is plain, that all the law demands, is the exercise of whatever strength we have, in the service of God. Now, as the law requires nothing more than the right use of whatever strength we have, it is, of course, forever settled, that a state of entire sanctification is attainable in this life, on the ground of natural ability.

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<sup>20</sup>Thomas Schreiner, *Magnifying God in Christ: A Summary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, Baker, 2010), 99.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 108.

2. The provisions of grace are such as to render its actual attainment in this life, the object of reasonable pursuit. It is admitted, that the entire sanctification of the church is to be accomplished. It is also admitted, that this work is to be accomplished, ‘through the sanctification of the Spirit and the belief of the truth’ (2 Thess 2:13). It is also universally agreed, that this work must be begun here; and also that it must be completed before the soul can enter heaven.<sup>22</sup>

However, the biblical data weighs against the notion of entire sanctification being realized in this life. Paul points to relief from sin to come after this life (Rom 6:21-25). In 2 Corinthians 3:18, Paul says that transformation will come by “degrees” (3:18), in no way indicating sanctification will be completed in this life.

Small group leaders that do not have a biblical view of the gospel run the risk of teaching a false gospel of works. Apart from a clear understanding of justification, the leader may leave those they teach to feelings of condemnation for their remaining sin, instead of understanding the right standing they have with God through Christ. Sanctification will enable the leader to assist those in the group to understand how transformation in the Christian life is possible.

Rather than the gospel being simply an entry way into the Christian life, much like the door of a house, the Bible presents the gospel as the house itself. Not only are Christians saved by the gospel, but they also grow by the gospel. Paul expressed his desire to preach the gospel to the church in Rome in Romans 1:15. “So I am eager to preach the gospel to you also who are in Rome.” What is significant about this verse is that the individuals he is addressing are Christians. Paul is eager to preach the gospel to Christians. The small group leader is mistaken if they do not believe those in their groups do not need to regularly grasp the gospel again for themselves.

Tim Lane and Paul Tripp, in their book *How People Change*, describe what they refer to as “gospel-blindness.” Tripp and Lane describe the gospel as being a “then-now-then” gospel. “First, there is the then of the past. When I embrace Christ by faith,

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<sup>22</sup>Charles Finney, *Finney’s Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1994), 382.

my sins are completely forgiven, and I stand before God as righteous. There is also the then of the future, the promise of eternity with the Lord, free of sin and struggle.”<sup>23</sup> The authors highlight that the church has done an effective job of proclaiming both of the “then’s” of the gospel. However, the church has not done an adequate job of explaining the “now” of the gospel. They give the following insight:

It is in the here and now that many of us experience a gospel blindness. Our sight is dimmed by the tyranny of the urgent, by the siren call of success, by the seductive beauty of physical things, by our inability to admit our own problems, and by the casual relationships within the body of Christ that we mistakenly call fellowship. This blindness is often encouraged by preaching that fails to take the gospel to the specific challenges people face. People need to see that the gospel belongs in their workplace, their kitchen, their school, their bedroom, their backyard, and their van. They need to see the way the gospel makes a connection between what they are doing and what God is doing. They need to understand that their life stories are being lived out within God’s larger story so that they can learn to live each day with a gospel mentality.<sup>24</sup>

Practically, small group leaders should not give those in their groups suggestions for change that simply rely on their own effort. Real change occurs as the individual repents and has faith in the gospel at the specific areas in their life where change needs to take place.

### **A Missional Mindset**

Theologian Millard Erickson comments on the significance of evangelism in the local church:

The one topic emphasized in both accounts of Jesus’ last words to his disciples is evangelism. In Matthew 28:19 he instructs them, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations.” In Acts 1:8 he says, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witness in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” This was the final point Jesus made to his

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<sup>23</sup>Tim Lane and Paul Tripp, *How People Change* (Winston-Salem: Punch Press, 2006), 4.

<sup>24</sup>*Ibid.*, 4.

disciples. It appears that he regarded evangelism as the very reason for their being.<sup>25</sup>

Craig Van Gelder defines a missional church as a church whose “self-understanding is that it is created by the Spirit as a called and sent community to participate fully in God’s mission in the world.”<sup>26</sup> Van Gelder elaborates on the view of mission held by the missional church, “Mission is no longer understood primarily in functional terms as something the church does . . . Rather it is understood in terms of something the church is, as something that is related to its nature.”<sup>27</sup>

That Jesus saw the nature of the church as being missional is seen in Acts 1:8, “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.” Being the witness’ which Jesus calls the church to be will, many times, be an individual act. Individual Christians will seek opportunities to proclaim the gospel, along with opportunities which will arise naturally. However, there is also a communal aspect of evangelism. Jesus says, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples if you have love for one another” (John 13:35).

The small group leader needs to be aware that biblically, fellowship is not something which Christians alone are to experience. Instead, fellowship should also be evangelistic. As Non-Christians are encouraged to be a part of the Christian community, witnessing the care and love believers have for one another, they will see the reality of the gospel. D.A. Carson provides the following insight:

The new command is therefore not only the obligation of the new covenant community to respond to the God who has loved them and redeemed them by the oblation of his Son, and their response to his gracious election which constituted

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<sup>25</sup>Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1061.

<sup>26</sup>Craig Van Gelder, “From Corporate Church to Missional Church: The Challenge Facing Congregations Today,” *Review and Expositor* 101 (2004): 426.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*, 437.

them his people, it is a privilege which, rightly lived out, proclaims the true God before a watching world.<sup>28</sup>

A natural tendency for a small group can be to become inward focused. The missionally minded small group leader will continuously encourage the group they lead to bring non-Christians to their meetings. As non-Christians witness the relationships believers have and hear Christians speak the gospel, they are in a position to be transformed by the gospel. Leaders will need to be leading the group in conversations about people groups which need to be reached and strategies their groups can employ to build relationships with those individuals in the hopes of bringing them into the community of believers so that unbelievers can hear and see the gospel. It is such an understanding of the church's role in evangelism that led Lesslie Newbigin to call the church the "hermeneutic of the gospel."<sup>29</sup> Newbigin elaborates on how the churches can impact society:

If the gospel is to challenge the public life of our society, if Christians are to occupy the 'high ground' which they vacated in the noon-time of 'modernity,' it will not be by forming a Christian political party, or by aggressive propaganda campaigns. . . . It will only be by movements that begin with the local congregation in which the reality of the new creation is present, known, and experienced, and from which men and women will go into every sector of public life to claim it for Christ, to unmask the illusions which have remained hidden and to expose all areas of public life to the illumination of the gospel. But that will only happen as and when local congregations renounce an introverted concern for their own life, and recognize that they exist for the sake of those who are not members, as sign, instrument, and foretaste of God's redeeming grace for the whole life of society.<sup>30</sup>

Instilling a missional mindset in a small group can only come from an individual who has adopted such a mentality for themselves. The leader should view

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<sup>28</sup>D.A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary (Leicester, England: Apollos, 1999), 485.

<sup>29</sup>Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralistic Society* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1989), 222-33.

<sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*, 232-33.



church as a community of believers which they are a part of, rather than something they go to or attend. Viewing the church as an event one attends versus something you are a part of are two fundamentally different perspectives on the purpose and function of the church. An individual who views the church as something one attends can be tempted to have a mentality that sees themselves as a consumer and the role of the church is to disperse religious product. Such a mindset is a hindrance to the evangelistic mission that Jesus called the church to.

However, the other mindset of church being something the individual is a part of should lead men and women to embracing the vision of the church as the vision for their life. Small group leaders will only lead their groups toward missional living if they are convinced themselves that Jesus calls them to live such a life.

### **Understanding of the Centrality of Scripture**

Wayne Grudem provides the following definition for the authority of Scripture, “The authority of Scripture means that all the words in Scripture are God’s words in such a way that to disbelieve or disobey any word of Scripture is to disbelieve or disobey God.”<sup>31</sup> In a small group setting, if Scripture is not the authority, then the opinions and feelings of the group members likely will be.

True biblical community will not happen apart from Scripture. As believers seek to understand and apply the Word of God to themselves and to those around them, comforting and encouraging one another with the Bible, and also rebuking and correcting when needed, they experience community. 2 Timothy 3:17 states that Scripture makes God’s people “competent, equipped for every good work.” Therefore, the small group leader must have a high view of Scripture which results in he or she leading their group to the authoritative text and seeking to conform their lives to it. Unfortunately, a common temptation is for Christians to conform the text to their lives. A clear example

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<sup>31</sup>Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 73.

of this is the often asked question, “what does this verse mean to you?” Walt Russell gives the following insight on this popular postmodern hermeneutic:

The meaning of a text never changes. Our first goal is to discover this fixed thing. In contrast, the significance of that text to me and to others is very fluid and flexible. By confusing these two aspects of the interpretation process, we evangelicals approach the Bible with an interpretive relativism. If it means one thing to you and something contradictory to me, we have no ultimate court of appeals. We can never establish and validate ‘the correct interpretation.’ In fact, our language and approach suggest that there is no such animal.<sup>32</sup>

Small group leaders should guard against the tendency to view the Bible in the subjective manner that Russell describes. In order for this to occur, the small group leader should understand the significance of authorial intent and grasp basic hermeneutic skills which can be used to understand the authors intended meaning.<sup>33</sup>

The small group leader that believes in the centrality of Scripture will also keep the Bible central when it comes to addressing issues where growth and change need to occur in the lives of group members. While most small group leaders would likely be uncomfortable with being viewed as a counselor, there will inevitably be times where the leader is put in such a position. This is only right when one has in mind a biblical view of community. While there is a place for professional counseling and care, Scripture shows much of that occurring within the body of Christ. Colossians 3:16 provides a glimpse of believers giving counsel to each other. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Much of counseling is teaching and admonishing, and Paul views it as occurring between individual Christians. The small group leader, on numerous occasions, will be a counselor for the group. What is

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<sup>32</sup>Mahaney, *Why Small Groups?*, 110.

<sup>33</sup>Resources to utilize in teaching small group leaders hermeneutics are Robert Stein, *A Basic Guide to Understanding the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994). Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All its Worth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002).

relevant from Colossians 3:16 while considering the centrality of Scripture is that Paul calls Christians to have “the word dwell in you richly.” In other words, when the small group leader counsels his or her group, they are to do so using Scripture. David Powlison discusses the importance of Scripture in counseling and the unique view of counseling that Scripture presents:

From the outset, Scripture redefines how we tend to define ‘counseling’. Counseling is not fundamentally a professional helping activity, where an identifiably competent party intentionally offers aid to an identifiably distressed party in a formalized structure (such as weekly one-hour sessions on a fee-for-service basis). Given the culture’s professionalized definition, the Bible seems relatively insufficient – even utterly silent – on the subject of counseling. But if counseling is about the tongue, and wise or foolish companions, and master-disciple relationships, and one-anothering influences for good or bad, and the truth or lie that speaks in the heart, and ministry of the Word of life . . . then the Bible brims. Relatively formal, private counseling ought to characterize both the informal relationships and public ministry. Counseling, whatever its formal or informal status, is either foolish (reorienting us away from God and toward our own self-trust) or wise (reorienting us to God). We need, first and foremost, to learn our own paradigm for understanding and transforming human nature, and that is exactly the Bible’s major focus in revealing God on the stage of human life.<sup>34</sup>

The Bible is to be on the forefront of any small group because apart from it, real change is not possible. The inadequacy that the leader experiences when counseling their group is natural and right. However, God has provided Scripture, which is authoritative and transformative.

### **A Passion for Prayer**

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian life and it also has a critical role to play in the community of saints. Jeffrey Arnold comments on the role of prayer in a small group:

True prayer belongs in the small group because its effects are enhanced in community. Prayer allows a group to learn more about God. Small group prayer also helps people know each other better. When we share communication with

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<sup>34</sup>David Powlison, “Cure of Souls (and the Modern Psychotherapies),” *The Journal of Biblical Counseling* 5 (2007): 14.

God, we are also communicating with each other. In prayer our greatest desires often pour forth. We exchange, with God and each other, our vision, love for God and motivation to follow him. Small group prayer also gives structure to the rejoicing, suffering body of Christ spoken of in 1 Corinthians 12. It is difficult to get a fellowship or congregation of eighty – or 250 or 1,000 – to identify intimately with your struggles and joys. In groups, however, we can learn to freely share together in prayer with close friends. People who share prayer needs and joys in a small group are loved and cared for.<sup>35</sup>

The small group leader should understand that prayer is often learned in community. The disciples ask Jesus to teach them to pray (Lk 11:1). Prayer should not be relegated to a small part of the group's time together. Instead it should be a substantial aspect of the small group meeting. The leader should encourage those in the group to take all of their concerns to God in prayer and the leader will likely need to model this for those in the group. Many Christians struggle with prayer. Either feeling discouraged by their inability to pray or they do not pray about specific issues in their life. Therefore, the small group leader, whether he or she realizes it, will be one of the greatest influences concerning prayer for those in the group.

A leader with a passion for prayer needs to be strategic during the portion of the groups meeting when prayer requests are given. All too often, giving prayer requests can focus only on the sick or hurting. Obviously, we should pray for the sick (Jas 5:13-15). Yet, the leader needs to keep the prayer time from becoming a time where the only concern is for the sick to recover. Leaders should guide those to not merely pray for the sick to recover, but also pray for their perseverance in the midst of their illness. It is likely that some in the group will not see God's activity in the circumstances of individuals who are being prayed for. The task of the leader is to help those in the group think and pray biblically for the sick and hurting. Small group leaders should lead their groups to pray for those who do not know Christ, in their community and the world. Such praying reminds the group of their purpose – to make disciples. Prayer should also

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<sup>35</sup>Arnold, *The Big Book on Small Groups*, 184-85.

be given for the church and its leadership. Praying for the church and the leadership of the church should be a time of developing unity among the members of the group and among the group with the wider church.

There are numerous other things that leaders should guide their groups to pray for, such as those in government positions, other gospel-believing churches, and anything that group members could express the desire to pray for. The small group leader will need to be aware of the temptation for some to use times of prayer for gossip. The leader should quickly interrupt and end any attempt at gossip or slander and bring the groups focus back on prayer.

The group that does not pray should not expect anything supernatural to occur within the context of the group. Church's should not assume that their group leaders know the importance of prayer. While many Christians affirm that prayer is an essential part of their lives, too often it is the Christian's ability to plan or prepare that is trusted. D.A. Carson provides needed insight into this:

The one thing we most urgently need in Western Christendom is a deeper knowledge of God. We need to know God better. . . . One of the foundational steps in knowing God, and one of the basic demonstrations that we do know God, is prayer – spiritual, persistent, biblically minded prayer. . . . But we have ignored this truism. We have learned to organize, build institutions, publish books, insert ourselves into the media, develop evangelistic strategies, and administer discipleship programs, but we have forgotten how to pray.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps it is the lack of prayer that is the reason so many churches and small groups do not experience true gospel transformation. James 4:2 states the need for prayer clearly, “You do not have, because you do not ask.” It is the responsibility of the leader to lead the group to ask in prayer for the salvation of those without Christ and real growth in the lives of those within the group. Apart from prayer these will not take place.

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<sup>36</sup>D.A. Carson, *A Call to Spiritual Reformation* (Grand Rapids: 1992), 15-16.

## **Conclusion**

The task of leading a small group should not be taken lightly. The man or woman who would lead a small group has set out on the task of leading others into a deeper relationship with Christ and further on his mission to make disciples throughout the world. Therefore leaders must have a growing relationship with Christ, they must be equipped, they must have a biblical understanding of the church, the gospel, a missional mindset, an understanding of the centrality of Scripture and a passion for prayer. While being a small group leader is a tremendous undertaking, the leader should be continuously reminded of the truth that they do not go about this work alone, but in the power of the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-18).

## CHAPTER 4

### DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY AT SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH

#### **Introduction**

This chapter's purpose is to report the execution of the ministry project of developing an effective small group ministry at Salem Baptist Church. The desire to implement an effective small group ministry came from theological and practical convictions.

The theological convictions being the biblical emphasis on community and its role in sanctification, discussed in chapter two. The practical convictions were the over-programming of the congregation. The abundance of programs that occurred on a Sunday gave the congregation little time to apply the word and pursue genuine life-change.

#### **The Project**

The project lasted fifteen weeks. Prior to the project, I met with the Connect Group leaders to explain the project's rationale and what would take place during the time allotted. The first week of the project consisted of meeting with a focus group made up of members of Salem Baptist Church. During the second week, the Connect Group (the name for Salem Baptist's small group ministry) leaders were surveyed concerning their previous training as a small group leader. A four week small group study and sermon series on the biblical theme of community followed. The week after the sermon series and small group studies ended, those in Connect Groups took a survey that asked how

helpful the sermons and studies were in their understanding of the role Connect Groups have in the church. Connect Group leader training began the next week. Finally, members of the focus group that met previously came back together to discuss the impact of the project and possibilities for the future to enhance the small group ministry.

### **Meeting with Connect Group Leaders**

Prior to the project, a meeting was held with the Connect Group leaders to explain the rationale for the project and what would take place during that time. The information given to the Connect Group leaders at this meeting was information they had received in previous meetings. However, this meeting was held solely to discuss the contents of the project.

During the meeting, Connect Group leaders were told of how the goal of an effective small group ministry was to be more effective at making disciples in Salem Baptist Church. The leaders were then told about the focus group which would consist of people from all demographics in the church to discuss their understanding of small groups currently in the church and how they believe the church views small groups. The surveys that would be distributed to them and to those who attend Connect Groups were explained. The goals behind the survey for the leaders was to determine what prior training the church had provided for those who lead small groups. The survey which Connect Group members would fill out would focus on how well the sermon and small group series on community helped them understand the necessity of small groups. The small group leader training was explained as being a time to help leaders understand the essential characteristics of being an effective small group leader. At the close of the meeting, the leaders held a collective time of prayer for the project and the individuals who attend Connect Groups.



## **The Focus Group**

On Sunday, August 1, 2010, a seven-member focus group met for an hour-long discussion about the current state of the churches small group ministry. The members of the group were chosen from various age segments of the congregation, along with varying amounts of time as members of the church. One couple had joined a few months prior to meeting and another couple had been members of the church for several years.

The majority of the conversation focused on the churches current understanding of the purpose Connect Groups have in the church. In 2008, the church voted to change the name of Sunday School to Connect Groups. For several months prior to the vote, meetings took place between the pastoral staff, deacons, and Connect Group leaders. The purpose of the meetings was to explain the vision of Connect Groups.

The primary purpose of Connect Groups is to connect people to God, each other, and our church. This is done as individuals study the Bible, helping each other to apply it, and form relationships with those in the group. After a series of meetings, there was a series of sermons to explain to the congregation the new direction of Sunday School and provide the rationale and vision that were driving the changes. The week prior to the vote, a letter was given to each person in Sunday School (still named at that time) concerning the vote that would occur at the business meeting for the name change and renewed purpose of Sunday School.

The focus group unanimously agreed that in spite of all that had been done initially and since then, the congregation is largely unaware of the purpose of Connect Groups. The focus group agreed that the church sees it simply as changing the name from Sunday School to Connect Groups.

The focus group also discussed the significance of the Connect Group leader in passing on the vision of Connect Groups to their groups. Several said that many of the Connect Group leaders had not made substantial changes in their teaching or leadership

style toward the group since the Connect Group emphasis began. Some in the focus group made the remark that it is simply an hour of listening to the Connect Group leader giving a monologue, instead of having a dialogue about a particular passage of Scripture and helping each other apply what is taught.

Ultimately, for any vision to truly gain traction in a congregation, the leaders must have that vision themselves, embody the vision, and regularly share it with those they lead. This was not happening in the Connect Group leaders. One focus group member made the remark that in some groups it was still essentially Sunday School.

All members of the focus group agreed that the vision of Connect Groups was clear and needed in the church. One of their greatest struggles in the new vision of small groups was the aspect of opening up their lives to those in the group. They had grown accustomed to the common practice of sharing prayer requests for the sick and hurting and guarding their life-struggles from those around them. The reasons given for such hesitancy was the fear of other group members gossiping about what they may share. There was also a concern as to whether the people in the group genuinely cared and were interested in such struggles.

We then discussed ways to overcome such fears and the resolution again went back to the leader. If Connect Group leaders want those in their group to open up, then they must take the first step. The leader, some said, needs to share areas of their life where they fall short and want to take steps forward. The goal of leaders opening up is that if leaders take the first step in such a direction, group members would then follow.

As the conversation came to a close, I asked the group if they could think of a time when the Connect Groups embodied what we hoped they would accomplish. The majority said the clearest example of Connect Groups accomplishing their purpose is the in home prayer meetings groups have every January. Every January is prayer emphasis month at Salem Baptist Church. During that month, the evening services consist of each

Connect Group meeting in the leader's homes for prayer. The focus group said that in homes, people are more relaxed and they are more ready to open their lives to those around them. The focus group was an excellent opening to the remaining fourteen weeks of the project. The group allowed me to have a clear understanding of the congregations understanding of Connect Groups and many areas that the project needed to address.

### **Connect Group Leader Survey**

The following week, each Connect Group leader received a survey about their training as a small group leader and how adequate they felt to teach their group the gospel, the mission of the church, key doctrines, how to study the Bible, and finally how significant their personal sanctification impacted their effectiveness as a leader.

The first question each leader answered was how long they had been teaching Connect Groups or Sunday School at Salem Baptist Church. Some had been teaching for only a few years, others as long as twenty years. While some indicated they had received adequate training to teach a small group, many said their training was haphazard at best. The church had offered no formal training, instead the group leaders had attended training offered by the denomination.

All of the leaders ranked themselves high in their ability to teach the churches belief and mission. The surveys revealed the need for formal training from the church for its small group leaders. While denominational and other outside training is good, only the church has the ability to train its leaders to accomplish its unique mission.

### **Sermon Series on Community**

On Sunday, August 15, a four-week sermon series began entitled "Community." The purpose of the series was to help the congregation see the theme of community in the Bible and the role Connect Groups are supposed to have in the church. At the same time, a four-week Connect Group series, also entitled "Community," took

place to coincide with the sermons. In the typical Sunday School/worship service model, there are two competing lessons – a different lesson to those in Sunday School and a unrelated sermon in the worship service. An evening service which included another sermon that was not related to what was discussed in either of the morning settings followed later in the day.

The goal of all teaching and preaching should be the changed lives of the hearers. With such a large amount of teaching in one Sunday however, a concern became whether people had sufficient time to apply the sermon to their lives. During the sermon series on community, it was important to connect the small group time with the main worship time so that the messages would be aligned and so that the church would experience a series of Sundays where individuals left with one idea instead of several competing ideas.

The first small group session and sermon focused on the biblical theme of community. In Connect Groups, the focus was Paul's use of the image of the church as "the body of Christ" found in 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. A large part of the lesson focused on verse 13, "For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit." Paul points out that we become members of the body of Christ at the moment of conversion when we are baptized with the Holy Spirit. Practically, this should display itself in the Christian's life by joining a local church. While we do have an individual relationship with Jesus, we should also emphasize the fact that we were saved for community.

The first sermon in the series was entitled "Community." The sermon started in Genesis, as the church saw that God has always lived in community as Trinity. The story line of the Bible was preached to show the congregation that central to the storyline of Scripture is the community of God's people. The church was challenged to examine their lives to see if it was in the flow of the story of the Bible and what God is doing in history.

Are they a vital part of the community of God's people or do they see no use for it?

The second Connect Group session and second sermon were entitled "One Another." The phrase "one another" is used 65 times in the New Testament. During this session, Connect Groups read several of the "one another" passages and discussed ways their group could look like what is described in the "one another" passages. This session also provided Connect Groups an opportunity to discuss the meeting practices of the church in Acts. The early church met in the temple and in homes. This conversation led the groups to discuss the purpose of Sunday morning worship gatherings and then the purpose small groups have. Group leaders then explained the purpose Connect Groups have in Salem Baptist Church.

The Scripture passage for the "one another" sermon was Hebrews 10:24-25. The author of Hebrews calls believers to "stir up one another." This was to be done because "the Day" of Jesus' return and judgment is drawing near. At the end of the sermon the congregation was shown a video clip of several "one another" passages, after the clip, the congregation was challenged to practice those passages in some way before the service ended. Several relationships took steps toward reconciliation as people went to individuals seeking forgiveness. Many who were present commented on how it was a significant time in the life of the church.

Sessions 3 and 4 in the series brought focus to the mission statement of the church and how Connect Groups helped the church accomplish its mission. The mission statement for Salem Baptist Church is "Salem Baptist Church exists to see Gospel Transformation in our church, into our city, and to the corners of the earth." Session 3 was entitled "Gospel Transformation in our church through Connect Groups."

Theologically, the focus of this lesson was progressive sanctification and how small groups are a vital atmosphere for Christians in the process of sanctification. Hebrews 3:12-13 was the passage for study among the small groups during this session.

Verse 12 warns the readers not to have hardened hearts that lead them to fall away and verse 13 shows that this happens as Christians exhort “one another.” The groups then discussed how they could care for and encourage each other as the passage calls them to.

The sermon then was based on Paul’s words in Ephesians 2:14-22 and 4:11-17. In the sermon the church saw that Christians are saved for each other. Paul clearly shows that Jesus came to “create in himself one new man” (2:15). He came to create the church. Then the church saw from 4:11-17 that Christians are sanctified with each other. Paul says that as we speak the truth in love to one another we “grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ.” While Christians can and do grow on their own, God has intended the community of the church to be a primary factor in our sanctification.

The fourth small group session and sermon focused on the latter part of the church mission statement, “Gospel Transformation in into our city and to the corners of the earth through Connect Groups.” The focus in both sessions was the communal nature of evangelism. It is impossible to share the gospel if Christians do not know the gospel. A substantial part of the Connect Group study was teaching the basic aspects of the gospel: God is our creator, man has sinned, Jesus has died for sin, taking man’s place, forgiveness is available only through him and people must repent and place their faith in him immediately.

Groups then studied Matthew 5:13-16. Jesus says the church is “the salt of the earth”, and “the light of the world.” In both images the church is impacting the world. Jesus is not saying the church should strive to be these things, instead he is saying they already are by virtue of being the church. The church is evangelistic by being the church. This is not to say that Christians should not verbally share the gospel. The gospel is good news, news is to be shared verbally. Yet when the church loves one another, serves together, and the world see it, the church is speaking to the reality of the gospel that has given it life.

The final sermon in the “community” series dealt with Jesus’ words in John 13:34-35. In the passage Jesus says that the world will know Christians are his disciples by their love for one another. The sermon discussed how Jesus loved people in visible, tangible, and costly ways. The greatest evangelistic strategy the church has is love for one another. Such love is to be clearly displayed in Connect Groups, as they become aware of each other’s needs, meet those needs, and build up those around them.

### **Connect Group Survey**

The following week, individuals who attend Connect Groups were given a survey which was to determine the effectiveness of the “Community” small group and sermon series. The survey consisted of five statements and a scale to rate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a particular statement. All who took the survey said the sermon series helped them understand how small groups help the church accomplish its mission. An important question on the survey was the last question, “Because of the sermon series and study on small groups, I see the necessity for me to be in a small group so that I can discover and use my spiritual gifts.” The highest score individuals could give each question was a four or five, indicating they either agreed with the statement or strongly agreed with the statement. All who took the survey gave the highest choices possible.

### **Connect Group Leader Training**

Connect Group leader training began the following week. The training lasted seven weeks, each session lasting thirty minutes, taking place before the evening worship service. The material for each session came from chapter three of this project, entitled “Characteristics of an Effective Small Group Leader.”

The first session of Connect Group leader training focused on the necessity of the leader to have a growing relationship with Christ. The Gospel of Luke clearly shows

Jesus depending on the Holy Spirit throughout his ministry. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit (1:35), at his baptism the Holy Spirit descends on him (3:22), he was filled with the Spirit as the Spirit sends him into the wilderness where Jesus was tempted by the devil (4:1-2), he begins his ministry in Galilee in the Spirit's power (4:14), he also reads the scroll of Isaiah saying that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (4:18). This is an emphasis that Luke continues as he writes the book of Acts. Jesus tells the disciples not to leave Jerusalem but to wait for the promised Holy Spirit (1:4-5), Jesus then tells them that the Holy Spirit will empower them to be his witnesses throughout the world (1:8), the Holy Spirit comes at Pentecost and saves three thousand people (2:41), Luke says that Peter was "filled with the Holy Spirit" as he begins to preach before the authorities (4:8), as the believers pray for boldness they are filled with the Spirit to continue to preach the Word (4:31), Stephen is filled with the Holy Spirit as he is stoned to death (7:55).

Life-giving ministry can only come by the Holy Spirit. This is true in small groups. If the small group leader hopes to make an impact on the lives of those in their groups, then they must cultivate a growing relationship with Jesus and dependence on the Holy Spirit. Group Leaders were asked to discuss ways they have found leading a Connect Group too big a task for them to rely on themselves. The leaders recounted several times when group members had shared an issue in their life or the life of a friend and how the leader felt inadequate to provide hope. Another area that came up was the weekly teaching of small group material. Real application is a spiritual work. The consensus of the group was that the task of leading a small group was entirely something they must rely on God for. As the first session closed, the discussion turned to the leaders current practices for spiritual growth. They were then challenged to regular Bible intake, prayer, and other spiritual disciplines.

The second session dealt with the necessity of equipped small group leaders. Specifically, equipped theologically to teach basic doctrines of the faith and equipped to



teach the larger vision of the church. Ephesians 4:12 says that those whom God has put in leadership of his church are to equip the saints for ministry. Small group leaders are not exempt from this. If small group leaders are going to equip those in their group, they themselves must be equipped.

Small group leaders need to be equipped to teach doctrine because it is in the context of people discussing Scripture that questions are asked, ideas are shared, and there is real potential for error and false teaching to begin. Colossians 1:28 says, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.” The goal is maturity in Christ. For maturity to be accomplished group members need to be taught basic doctrines such as the person and attributes of God, the Trinity, Christology, pneumatology, soteriology, ecclesiology, and eschatology. The theological teaching and understanding small group leaders need should begin with the church’s statement of faith. The majority of this session was taken up with discussing the importance of each leader knowing the church’s larger vision and how small groups fit into that vision. Leaders said that if it is not known what Connect Groups are supposed to accomplish they could take their group in a different direction than the church as a whole is going. The leaders were then taught the goal of Connect Groups, “Connecting people to God, each other, and our church” and practically how that should manifest itself each week in their groups. Group leaders were challenged to keep their groups outward in focus and intentional at equipping the members of their group by providing them numerous opportunities to serve.

In the third session, leaders were taught that to be effective they needed to have a biblical understanding of the church. If a leader does not have a proper view of the church, they run the risk of emphasizing the individual nature of Christianity at the expense of the corporate. The apostle John, in 1 John 1:7 writes, “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus

cleanses us from all sin.” John is clear in affirming that an aspect of walking in the light will be having fellowship with other Christians. While leaders need to express to those in their groups that being an active member of a church does not save them, it is an indicator of their salvation. Obviously there are people, such as shut-ins, who are not capable physically of being a part of the corporate gatherings of Christians. Yet for many Christians, corporate worship is not only possible, it is expected from Scripture for those in Christ. Therefore, small group leaders need to teach that being a part of the church is not optional for Christians, it is essential.

A biblical understanding of the church will also provide group leaders with a proper view of themselves as under the spiritual authority of the leaders in the particular congregation they serve. This particular aspect of the lesson was new for several Connect Group leaders. Pastors and leaders having spiritual authority was not a category they had previously considered in their understanding of congregationalism. A discussion of Hebrews 13:17 ensued. The author of Hebrews, in 13:17, calls the church to “obey your leaders and submit to them.” While many in Baptist churches may be unfamiliar or uneasy with this topic, it is biblical. Pastors are to serve their congregations by leading them in the direction God has given to the church. If the leaders are seeking to do this apart from intentional sin and ill-will from the church, the congregation should submit. A small group leader who understands such principles will seek to lead his or her group in the direction of the church rather than their own direction.

The fourth training session for leaders dealt with a biblical understanding of the gospel. If the small group leader does not have a clear understanding of the gospel the potential for teaching legalism or pointing to something other than Jesus for ones assurance will always remain. Leaders were taught four essential elements of the gospel; the person and characteristics of God, man’s fall into sin, the substitutionary life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and the necessity for individuals to respond to the gospel.

Christians should not make the assumption that the gospel is only for unbelievers. Paul, in Romans 1:15, says he is “eager to preach the gospel” to the Christians in Rome. If small group leaders hope to see true change in the lives of those in their group, they will preach the gospel to them. The leaders then took part in a discussion of examples on how to preach the gospel to Christians. The area of money was a particular example. Jesus does not speak about money as if it is neutral. He says in Matthew 6:24, “no one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money,” Jesus is saying money can be served like a god. In order for Christians to keep money in its proper place, they need to be taught and believe the riches they have in Christ, his sovereignty over their lives and continuous care for their lives.

The Connect Group leader having a missional mindset was the content of the fifth session. Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8 record the final words of Jesus before his ascension. The content of both was to take the gospel to the world and make disciples. The word missional was one some of the Connect Group leaders were not familiar with. During the session, the leaders were taught that the church needs to think of missions not as something it does. Instead the church should see missions as who it is. Missions is not merely a function of the church it is central to the identity of the church. The church is a missional people.

The theme of missions is not simply seen in the Great Commission, it is central to the entire story of the Bible. Leaders were then taken throughout Scripture, beginning with God’s promise to send Jesus in Genesis 3:15, to see God accomplishing his saving purpose as he forms his people and sends them out.

The leaders were then asked about what can distract a small group from its mission. Several answers were given, the one most agreed upon was a wrong understanding of fellowship. Many small groups have unknowingly become cliques.

Rather than having an outward focus, such groups now focus on the immediate needs of those already present. This is seen in prayer requests that focus solely on sick family members or friends and neglect mentioning the lost in the community.

If small groups are to recover their missional purpose, leaders must lead by example. The small group leader should mention by name individuals who are not Christians and pray for their salvation. Other examples of actions group leaders can take to gain a missional focus in the group is setting a goal for launching another group from the current one in existence. The small group could also examine the surrounding community and meet a particular need. The natural result of small groups who are on mission together is that they will experience community together.

Effective small group leaders also need an understanding of the centrality of Scripture, which made up the content of the sixth leadership training session. While many small group leaders would claim that Scripture is central in their group, it should not be assumed this is the case. If Scripture is not central then the group runs the risk of being led by the opinions and feelings of those in the group. This can often be found in the well-meaning but misguided question that is often asked in small group settings, “What does this verse mean to you?”

The problem with such a question is that it opens the group up to losing the role of authorial intent in the interpretation of a particular passage. Small groups need to understand that a particular passage of Scripture has a specific meaning and it is the intended meaning that the author of the passage had when it was originally written.

Paul shows small group leaders the importance of Scripture in the discipleship of those in their group when he says that it is Scripture which makes “the man of God . . . competent, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:17). Weekly, small group leaders will encounter people who are experiencing a wide range of emotions and experiences. The small group leader who understands the centrality of Scripture will seek to lead those

in their groups to apply Scripture to their circumstances and be changed by it.

Authorial intent is such an important issue that most of this training session was spent discussing three questions that are meant to assist the small group leader in determining the authors meaning. The questions were (1) “Who wrote it?” This question is simply designed to help the small group leader determine the author of the book the particular passage that the small group leader is studying, and (2) “Why did they write it?” Each passage of Scripture came out of a real historic event. There was a reason the author is writing the particular book of the Bible. Once the small group leader discovers what that reason is, they are well on their way to discovering the original meaning of a passage of Scripture. The final question is “What’s the point?” The goal is to discover the point of that specific passage of interest. Now that the small group leader knows who the author is and why he wrote what he did, they will have an easier time of tracing the argument that is presented in each book of the Bible, allowing them to find the point, or original meaning of a passage of Scripture.

The final session of small group leadership training focused on the leader having a passion for prayer. Prayer in small groups needs to be more than something tacked on at the beginning and end of the group’s time together. People learn to pray in community. The disciples see Jesus praying in Luke 11:1, and when he was finished, one of them asked him to teach them to pray. As people listen to others pray, they are learning to pray for themselves.

The small group leader who knows this, needs to become strategic in how they utilize prayer in the small group. An example of this is praying for the sick. Typically, prayer for the sick focuses on the individual recovering from their illness. While this is something the group needs to pray for, group leaders are doing their groups and the individual they are praying for a disservice if that is all they pray for. Prayers need to be made for the individual’s faith, their perseverance, and the spiritual warfare they are

likely experiencing during their illness. Strategic prayer can also be given for those who are not Christians by praying for people by name instead of generically praying for the lost.

The group leader must always be aware of the fact that if the group does not pray, they should not expect God to move in their group. John, in Revelation 8:1-5, provides a glimpse into the mystery of God's sovereignty and our prayers intertwining. While God does not wait for our input or counsel, he has chosen to make the prayers of his people a part of how he works out his plans in this age.

### **Second Focus Group Meeting**

The week after Connect Group leader training ended, members of the focus group came back together to discuss the project, how it helped the church, and what could be done in the future to continue the enhancement of the churches small group ministry. The members of the focus group said the sermon and small group series was very effective at clarifying the role small groups have in the church and the individuals responsibility to be a part of one. They also discussed how much they enjoyed the streamlining that took place during the series of the Connect Group lesson and the sermon. Both the lesson and sermon dealing with the same idea provided people with focus during the morning, as they would only be exposed to one idea rather than competing ideas. The streamlining of ideas also helped in applying what people were exposed to.

The streamlining of Connect Group lessons with the sermon was something the focus group said needed to happen into the future. It was suggested that during a sermon series of particular importance, the Connect Group lessons should be streamlined to fit into the sermon series as well. The focus group said that the Connect Group leader training was also something that was needed in the church and hoped would continue.

## CHAPTER 5

### EVALUATION OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of this project was to create an effective small group ministry at Salem Baptist Church. The project began with a meeting of the Connect Group leaders to discuss the project and pray for the church. The next part of the project was a meeting with seven members of the church to discuss their understanding of the role small groups played within the church and whether the church as a whole understood the changes that were taking place in the small group ministry of the church. This was followed by a survey of the Connect Group leaders, focusing on their time as a small group leader, previous training, and how their personal knowledge of Scriptures effects teaching a small group. A four-week sermon series and small group study titled Community began the following week. The purpose of the sermon series and small group study was to help the church understand the significance of community in the Bible and how small groups play a crucial role in helping the church fulfill its mission. A survey was then distributed to the individuals who attend Connect Groups to determine whether the sermon series and small group study enhanced their understanding and appreciation of community in the Bible and its role in their life and the life of Salem Baptist Church. Six-weeks of Connect Group leader training was the next part of the project. The project concluded with a final meeting of the focus group which met earlier in the project with the purpose of discussing the success of the emphasis given to small groups during the weeks of the project and what could be done in the future to further emphasize the necessity of small groups in the church.

### **Evaluation of the Project Goals and Rationale**

The first goal of the project was to show the church how small groups help accomplish the purpose of the church. This goal was accomplished by the four-week sermon series and small group study on community. An important part of this portion of the project was that the small group material which would be taught in Connect Groups coincide with the topic being preached on that morning. Rather than having two competing ideas that people are having to process, during the four week sermon series and small group study, individuals left the worship service with one central idea. The focus group indicated they appreciated the streamlined approach that was taken during the sermon series and small group study. Other members of the church made the same observation.

I gave Connect Group members surveys following the study that indicate the success of the sermon series which help the church understand the importance of small groups. Participants responded, “As a result of the sermon series and study on small groups, I understand how small groups help our church accomplish its mission.” They answered the questions using a number scale from one through five, one representing strongly disagree and five representing strongly agree. Everyone who took the survey gave a four or five, indicating they agreed or strongly agreed with that statement. One survey did respond with a one and the person filling out the survey wrote next to the question, “I understood their importance before the study.”

Another statement on the survey that participants responded to was, “Because of the sermon series and study on small groups, I see the necessity for me to be in a small group so that I can discover and use my spiritual gifts.” All of the participants gave a four or five, indicating they all agreed with the statement.

The second goal of the project was to see 80 percent of the active membership join a Connect Group. When I arrived at Salem Baptist Church as their pastor, the



Sunday School attendance hovered close to 50 people. During my second year as pastor (2008), I started the initiative of transitioning the small group ministry of the church from traditional Sunday School to an effective small group ministry. This consisted of meetings with church leaders, Sunday School teachers, vision casting to the entire congregation, and letters explaining the rationale for the changes. In 2008 the church voted to change the name of Sunday School to Connect Groups and adopt a new vision of small groups which would mean viewing groups as the primary tool of discipleship the church would use and its primary means of assimilation as we urged people to join a small group.

These changes resulted in a surge of numeric growth that continued throughout the weeks of the project. Salem Baptist Church averaged 150 in weekly worship attendance. By the end of this project, Connect Group attendance was at 100. Many weeks, small group attendance would rise to 110 or 120. The percentage of active members that joined a small group ranged between 60 to 70 percent. This goal was not achieved because the change in thinking necessary for a traditional church to grasp new thinking regarding small groups will not occur quickly. In many cases it will take several years. Sunday School had been offered since the church was originally founded and it was viewed in the eyes of the congregation as simply another program that one could choose to participate in or not. The individuals who taught Sunday School also viewed the time as simply another Bible study. This mindset is hard to change and would take longer than the time allotted for this project. The philosophy behind Connect Groups was to see small groups transform from a program the church offers to something the church revolves around. People would connect with each other and God in a unique way. If this were to happen the mindset of the leaders must also change so that they view themselves not simply as Bible study leaders, but as men and women leading the churches most significant ministry outside of the Sunday morning worship experience. This mindset

changed in many members of the church who adopted the philosophy of small groups. However, for other individuals, they still saw small groups as something their family could simply choose not to attend because it was not significant for them.

The third goal of the project was to train the current Connect Group leaders to become better small group leaders. This was accomplished by the Connect Group leader training that was offered during the project. Prior to this, the church had offered no formal training to its small group leaders. Individuals could simply volunteer and would begin teaching the following week. The training lasted six weeks. Unfortunately, there were some sessions where group leaders were not able to attend the meeting. Some of those leaders asked for the notes of that particular session so they could read it on their own.

All of the leaders said the training was extremely beneficial for them and how they led their particular group. The material that was used in the training came from the outline of chapter 3, “Characteristics of an Effective Small Group Leader.” The characteristics discussed during the training were a growing relationship with Christ, the leader being equipped theologically and with an understanding of the churches vision, a biblical understanding of the church, a biblical understanding of the gospel, a missional mindset, an understanding of the centrality of the Scriptures, and a passion for prayer.

The final goal of the project was to become a better discipler of the small group leaders. This goal was accomplished by the group leader training and in conversations with the group leaders. As the pastor of Salem, I viewed small group leaders as pastors of the groups they led. Ephesians 4:12 says pastors are to “equip the saints for the work of ministry”. The role of pastor is to equip the equippers. In the case of Salem Baptist Church, the equippers are the small group leaders. Such a view is antithetical to the prevalent view held by many churches where the pastor does all of the ministry. The congregation which holds their pastor to such a standard ultimately hurts

their pastor and themselves. The pastor is hurt because all the ministry of one church is too great of a burden for one man to carry. The longer he tries, the closer he comes to burnout. The congregation is hurt because while they rely on the pastor to do the majority of the ministry, they are not using the spiritual gifts God has given them and their spiritual growth is stunted. Discipling each small group leader during the project not only occurred in the formal training, but also in personal conversations about their spiritual growth and what was occurring in their class.

### **Evaluation of the Methodology**

Upon reflection of the methodology utilized during the project there were positives and negatives that came to light.

#### **Strengths**

The alignment and focus the small group ministry brought to the church is a strength. Prior to the transition from Sunday School to small groups, the church did not have a clear path for how discipleship would occur. Individuals would join the church, however the church and leaders lacked a next step that would help those who came to the church grow in their faith and how the church could equip people to use their spiritual gifts. The new direction that the small group ministry brought to Salem Baptist Church was that it provided the church with an understanding of where people could go after they became members. When I became pastor of the church, a concern expressed to me by several individuals was the rapid rate the church lost new members. Individuals would join and then leave shortly afterwards because the church did not know what to do next.

An essential part of the small group philosophy adopted by the church was that small groups were the environment the church wanted to see its members move towards because it provided the best opportunity for growth and care. Because of the new focus on small groups, the church cut back on its programming. Previously the church offered

a discipleship training hour prior to the evening worship service. This was something the church had started to provide without an understanding its purpose. Once it was defined that small groups would be the place the church wanted to see its members move towards for their personal growth and accountability, the discipleship training hour was stopped.

Another one of the projects strengths was the four-week sermons series and small group study. The Connect Group members unanimously confirmed the effectiveness of the small group discussion and the sermon dealing with the same topic. James 1:22 shows that the goal of Scripture is not merely knowledge, but action when the apostle says “be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (ESV). Too often churches provide a lot of content and little opportunity for sincere application of what was taught. If it is deceptive to only hear Scripture taught, churches should consider whether the amount of content they are providing actually hinders people from doing what is being taught.

The advantage to having one central point in all of a church’s teaching opportunities in a given day is that it does not distract the hearer so that they mentally leave one lesson, which they have yet to apply, for a sermon they are about to hear. When one central thought is given in a small group or Sunday School class, and then it is reinforced by the sermon of the morning, it gives the hearer an opportunity to meditate longer on a specific truth and be changed by it.

This is not to say that the typical approach of varying lessons and sermons on a given Sunday is entirely ineffective. However, churches should consider whether they are overloading their people with content, making them hearers instead of doers.

A final strength was the clarification of the small group leaders role. Several small group leaders commented how helpful the training was because they had simply viewed themselves as Bible study leaders. They had never considered themselves as a key part in helping newcomers to the church assimilate in the church, or viewing

themselves as “equippers” (Eph 4:12 ESV).

### **Weaknesses**

Probably the greatest weakness to this project, as indicated earlier, was the amount of time it will take for the small group mindset to take hold in the church. Salem Baptist Church had traditionally utilized the Sunday School model found in many churches. The individuals in the church had grown up with this model. Bringing change to something as cherished as Sunday School is a careful and lengthy process.

The leader should take his or her context in view when attempting to establish a successful small group ministry in their church. For those in the context of a church plant or a church that is accepting of change, they may find the process to be quick and the congregation to welcome the change. This would be especially true of leaders in a church plant who are at the beginning stages of laying the foundation of the church and also their small group ministry. The new nature of the work will lend a lot of freedom to those leading the small group ministry because there is no tradition or mindset in place to change.

Those who are attempting to establish an effective small group ministry in a traditional church where leaders may find more resistance to change need to carefully think through what they want their small group ministry to accomplish and whether they are willing to pay the possible price to see it come to fruition. One such price that the leader may need to consider is whether they are willing to stay in their location long enough to see the changes become a natural part of the church rather than simply a new program that will come and go like many others before it. Leaders will also need to communicate the purpose of the changes to a small group model clearly and often. After several meetings with key leaders about this new philosophy, the same leaders would come and ask me to again explain the changes and why they were necessary. Vision

cannot be shared too often. When the leader believes he or she has shared the vision enough, the congregation has already forgotten the vision completely.

The leader should also honestly assess what the church can handle as far as change regarding small groups and what may not be suitable at the time. Part of my original goal for the project was to have the Connect Groups meet during Sunday evenings rather than the traditional Sunday School time, and simply have morning worship then small groups in the evening. However, it became clear that this would be too drastic of a change for the church to experiment with at the time, so I kept the schedule as it had traditionally been on Sundays.

While the four-week sermon series and small group study was a strength, it also made clear a weakness in that the streamlining of messages would only take place during the four week sermon period. Many expressed the desire to continue with that structure, but I was not able to maintain the preparation necessary to write sermons and small group material. The focus group that met during the last week of the project made the helpful suggestion that the leadership choose which sermon series during the year they want the church to pay particular attention to and write small group material for those.

### **Theological Reflection**

When this project began, I thought I was aware of how pervasive the theme of community was in Scripture. However, as I researched and studied for the project it quickly became clear that community was a far greater part of the meta-narrative of Scripture than I had previously considered. This should not be a surprise considering that at the heart of Scripture is God's desire to make a people for himself for his own glory. Before the opening scene of Scripture, God exists as Trinity, himself enjoying the community between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The creation of Adam and Eve in the garden is the first glimpse of God's desire for community with man made in his

image. Once sin destroys the original community God had with his people, he calls Abram and declares that from him, he will make a new community (Gen 12:1-3). As the drama of redemption advances, God's people Israel are slaves in Egypt. God sends Moses to be his agent of redemption so that God's people could worship. Thus community is central to the exodus account. Maintaining the community between God and his people is at the heart of the remainder of the Old Testament, from the laws of Leviticus to the role of the prophets. In the New Testament, Jesus begins his message with the declaration that "the kingdom of God is at hand" (Mark 1:14). Revealing the communal nature of his message and what he would do in establishing his church. The end of the Bible's story is the restoration of the community God had always intended, as the new heaven's and the new earth descend and "the dwelling place of God is with man" (Rev 21:3).

This insight gave me a new love for the church and a deeper understanding of the role community needs to play in my own sanctification. The repeated use of the phrase "one another" shows that believers play a critical role in each other's sanctification. I also gained a new love for small groups and their role within the church.

Prior to the project I had viewed small groups as another ministry a church offered. I now view them as central to the church making disciples. For the duration of my ministry I will pour into those who lead small groups so that disciples can be made in the context of the community of the local church.

### **Conclusion**

This project brought great clarity in my mind to the important task of how to make disciples. Community is the key. Jesus poured himself into twelve men, the early church, as it grew, met in homes. Through this project I have found that it is not enough for me to simply give someone reading material. Individually, I need to walk with them for a certain period of time. During this time, as they watch me live and as I help them

take their initial steps as a believer, a disciple is being made. Corporately, small groups cannot be viewed as something of minor importance in a church. They must be central to what the church does in helping people grow and making disciples.

This project will help pastors, those who lead small groups, and those thinking about making the transition from a traditional Sunday School model toward small groups. It is the role of the pastor to equip the saints for ministry. This job is too great for one man to take on his own. Regardless of how small the congregation a pastor serves may be, he will not be able to do the work alone. Instead, he must equip the equippers in his congregation, namely the small group leaders. Pastors and leaders can see through the biblical theology of community that it is central to God's plan and needs to be central to their churches. By establishing characteristics of an effective small group leader, churches can know what to look for in individuals who will lead small groups and what areas they need to equip those who will lead such a vital ministry. As leaders read the details of the project itself it will provide them with an opportunity to pray and consider how such a transition to small groups would look like in their context. The strengths and weakness' of the project will provide readers with a roadmap of what will be ahead of them and various things they will want to consider and try to avoid.



## APPENDIX 1

### CONNECT GROUP LEADER SURVEY

#### **Agreement to Participate**

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate you current needs as a Connect Group leader. This research is being conducted by Mark A. Combs for his Doctor of Ministry project seeking to develop an effective small group ministry. In this research, you will answer basic questions about the previous training you have received as a Connect Group leader and the current status of your spiritual growth. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey and questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

How long have you been a Connect Group Leader/Sunday School teacher?

Do you believe that you have been adequately trained in the past to lead the group you are currently leading?

If so, describe the previous training you have received.

In what areas would you like more training as a Connect Group leader?

How does your relationship with God impact your leadership in Connect Groups?

Are there areas in your spiritual life that you would want to see growth in?

Using the scale below write the number that corresponds to your answers to the following statements.

---

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly
Disagree				Agree

1. I feel adequately equipped to teach my group the essentials parts of the Gospel.

\_\_\_\_\_

2. I feel adequately equipped to teach my group the mission of our church. \_\_\_\_\_

3. I feel adequately lead my group through an introductory study of key doctrines.

\_\_\_\_\_

4. I feel adequately equipped to teach my group how to study the Bible. \_\_\_\_\_

5. My effectiveness as a Connect Group leader is connected to my growth as a Christian.

\_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 2

### SERMON SERIES

#### **Sermon 1 Manuscript: “Community”**

This morning we begin a four-week series entitled “Community.” Today, I want us to see that if our lives are going to make an impact in the world then we our lives need to be connected to what God is doing in the world.

Contrary to popular belief, the Bible is not a series of disconnected stories and verses. The Bible is one story about what God is doing in the world. And what God is doing in the world is making a community of people who love him and want to live for him and with him for all eternity. The only way our lives will make a difference is if that is the story of our lives.

This begins in Genesis 1, the Garden of Eden. In the opening pages of Scripture we see God creating Adam to have a perfect relationship with him. It is important to understand that God is not creating Adam because he is lonely. God has always existed in perfect community as Trinity. The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – one God who exists as three distinct persons – experienced perfect fellowship and joy among each other. To display God’s complete goodness and mercy, he created man.

God creates Adam and Adam is alone without human companionship. For the first time, God looks at his creation and say something is not good, “Then the Lord God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him” (Gen 2:18). God wanted Adam to experience the fellowship and joy he had as Trinity, so he made Eve. What God originally intended for creation was a community of people who love him and want to live with him and for him.

In Genesis 3 we see the destruction of that original community. Satan deceives Adam and Eve and the results are devastating. Genesis 2:25 shows the first couple naked and not ashamed. After disobeying God, “Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths” (Gen 3:7). For the first time shame enters the picture as Adam and Eve attempt to hide from one another. The perfect community Adam and Eve had was broken, but not simply between them. The community they had with God was also broken as we read in Genesis 3:8, “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden”.

Not only does sin separate us from God, it also separates us from each other. However, we see the grace of God in Genesis 3:15, “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel”. This is the first promise in the Bible that Jesus is coming. From this point on, God puts his plan into action of rescuing his people.

A few chapters later, in Genesis 12, God calls a man who would later be known as Abraham. God comes to Abram and tells him, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen 12:1-3). Notice that God tells Abram a great nation would come from him. God is speaking about Israel. God creates the community of his people, Israel.

In the book of Exodus, we read the following in account of Moses’ calling, “I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and

with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the Lord” (Ex 6:6-8). Do not miss all of the times God says, “I will” in this passage. Do you see the love God has for his people? He frees them from slavery, brings them into the wilderness so that he could be with his people and his people could worship him. But Israel, over and over, turned away from God. The rest of the Old Testament shows God refusing to give up on his stubborn people. It becomes clear that because of Israel’s sin, they cannot be the community of people God made them to be.

They are regularly offering animal sacrifices, but they need a perfect sacrifice. Centuries later John the Baptist appears to prepare the way for the coming of Jesus. The story of the Bible thus far begs the question “how can God have a community of people who love him and want to live with him and for him for all eternity?” The answer is that Jesus would buy that people.

One of the first things Jesus does is put together a group of twelve men, a new community of people. Jesus begins to talk about the church. The Holy Spirit comes in Acts 2 and gives birth to the church. In Ephesians, Paul describes the church as Jesus’ bride (Eph 5:25). In Galatians, the church is called “the Israel of God” (6:16). Meaning that God does not have two people, Israel and the church, he has one people, the church. God has grafted Gentiles into the tree of his people so that God’s people are the church. The church is at the center of God’s plan, it is not an afterthought.

Revelation 21 describes the return of Christ and the establishment of the new heavens and the new earth in a renewed creation. In the middle of the description, John hears a loud voice proclaiming, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their

God” (21:3). God tells us the end of the story and he will be with his people. He has saved us and we will be with him.

You might be hearing this thinking, “what does this have to do with me?” It’s simple, you are the church. You are the people of God. You have not come to church, you are the church. God is speaking to you about your life in this story. He says ‘I have saved you and made you a part of the community of people who love me and want to live for me and with me for all eternity and right now I want to use you to build that community.’ God never saves anyone in the Bible and then they go on with their life as planned. No one comes to God in a saving way in the Bible and then they fit God into the story of their life.

Every time God saves someone, he makes them a part of what he is doing. Abraham, Peter, Paul and he wants that to be true about you. I’m convinced one of the reasons the church today barely resembles the church described in the Bible is because we are trying to fit God into our lives and our plans instead of wrapping our lives around him. Instead of giving our lives to his kingdom we are devoted to our own. When we come to Jesus we forfeit ownership of our lives. We stop being the author of our lives (even though we never were).

Does your life look like the story God is telling? He has made you a part of his church and wherever he has placed you, you want to give your life to being a part of what he is doing. It might be controversial for you to realize but God does not simply have an individual plan for your life. Instead his plan for your life is a part of the larger story he is directing in the world. Have you ever asked God how your life and your plans fit into his bigger plan?

Some of you, when you think about community or church you think, “I don’t get anything out of this”, and that is the problem. You are looking to get instead of looking to give. There are to be no benchwarmers or spectators in God’s kingdom. God

did not save you to sit and watch, he saved you to be a part of what he is doing. What we need to realize is that our lives, connected to God's purpose, can make an eternal impact.

### **Sermon 2 Outline: "One Another"**

"How can we be the kind of church the Bible describes?" God answers that question. God answers that question sixty-five times in the New Testament by using the phrase "one another".

Examples of "one another" passages:

John 15:12, "This is my commandment, that you may love one another as I have loved you."

Ephesians 4:25, "Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members of one another."

James 4:11, "Do not speak evil against one another brothers. The one who speaks against a brother or judges his brother, speaks evil against the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge."

The "one another" passages are commands for how we should treat each other.

The "one another" passages show us that every person in the church needs to be filled with the Spirit so that we can do what God calls us to do as the church. Every person needs the Holy Spirit in order to do what God tells us in Hebrews 10:24-25.

Hebrews 10:24-25, "And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near."



Christians are to “stir up one another”

- The word the author uses literally means to provoke someone
- The author says Christians should “consider” ways to provoke the other people around them to love and good works

What the author of Hebrews is calling us to cannot be done in corporate worship with over 150 in attendance.

In Acts, the early church met in the temple and in homes.

- Homes were smaller groups that gave opportunity to practicing the “one another” passages
- At Salem Baptist Church, that translates to Connect Groups

We are to provoke one another to love.

Most of the “one another” passages are about love because Jesus died so that the church would be one.

Practical ways to provoke other Christians toward love:

Galatians 6:2, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.”

- To bear someone’s burdens means that you help carry them
- To bear a burden with someone means that we do tangible things to let them know they are not carrying the burden alone

Colossians 3:13, “Bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

- Sometimes the thing to “bear” is other people
- Christians will let you down, disappoint you, hurt you, not live up to your expectations
- If someone has hurt you, especially a Christian, forgive them
- If you have hurt someone, ask for their forgiveness

Practical ways to provoke other Christians to good works:

Galatians 5:13, “For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.”

- Christians should look for ways to serve other Christians

In verse 25, he says we should “encourage one another”. When is the last time you encouraged another Christian?

“... all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

- The Day the author of Hebrews is talking about is the day when Jesus comes back
- God wants us to provoke one another because there is not a lot of time left until he returns
- This is so serious that we get the warning found in verse 25.
- The people described forgot about the coming day

The wrong response is to hear this and think “no one has ever done this for me”

No church does the “one another” passages perfectly all the time.

This starts with each of us.

### **Sermon 3. “Gospel Transformation in our church through Connect Groups”, outline.**

If we are going to be the people God wants us to be then we need the people around us.

In this sermon we are talking about the first part of our mission statement and how Connect Groups help us accomplish that.

Gospel Transformation in our church means that we are a people who have been and are being transformed.

- Salvation is not the end, it is the beginning
- At the moment of salvation, God begins the process of making us more like Christ
- Theologically this is called Sanctification
- Sanctification is slow. At times, painfully slow

We tend to think of our sanctification as a private matter between us and God

- God never intended our growth as Christians to be a private matter
- God wants to make us into a different kind of person than you currently are and he intends to use the people around you to accomplish that

We will see two things from Ephesians 2:14-22 and 4:11-16

For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. And he came and preached peace to you who were far off and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access in one Spirit to the Father. So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit. (Eph 2:14-22)

And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love. (Eph 4:11-16)

### **1) We are saved for each other (2:14-22)**

Paul is talking about Jews and Gentiles. Both hated each other.

2:15, Jesus came to create “one new man”.

Jesus came to make a people, the church.

- Jesus did not come and die for random individuals who he would save and then live their individuals lives. He came to create a people.
- Many people want to say “I like Jesus but not the church”.
- It is not one or the other, it is both. Jesus and the church.
- Jesus saves individuals and makes them a part of his corporate body – the church.

### **2) We are sanctified with each other (4:11-17)**

Real Christian maturity won’t happen without each other.

Verse 15, we speak the truth to one another in love and we grow up

The practical commands Paul gives in the remainder of the book are to the church.

Sanctification is a community project

When we read the Bible and see a command from God, we should think “I’ll need help to do this.” Help from God and God’s people.

If you are not in a Connect Group, you need to make the move to one so that there will be people who can know you and speak into your life.

If you are in a small group, but you are hiding what is really going on in your life, today go to someone and tell them you need help.

### **Sermon 4 Outline: “Gospel Transformation into our city and to the corners of the world through Connect Groups.”**

John 13:34-35 “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.”

The more you grow as a Christian, the more you get on God's mission.

Do you see from these verses whose court Jesus puts the ball in to tell if we are real or not? Unbelievers.

Jesus is saying that our love for one another will be the indicator of whether or not we really are disciples.

What should this love look like?

How did Jesus love us?

**Jesus loved us in a visible way.**

- He didn't simply tell us he loves us. He loved us in a way that you could see – the cross.
- If the world is going to look at us and tell whether or not we are disciples, then our love for one another needs to consist in actions that are done. Not simply words.

**Jesus loved us in a tangible way.**

- His love had substance. It consisted of teaching, serving, dying, and coming back to life.

**Jesus loved us in a costly way.**

- There was tremendous sacrifice on his part in his love for us

Our love for one another should mirror Jesus' love for us. We should strive to meet each others needs, forgive those who have hurt us and seek forgiveness from those we have hurt.

**What would keep a church from loving this way?**

**1) Everything is closed handed.**

- There are open-handed issues and closed-handed issues. Closed-handed issues are those we believe and are essential such as the deity of Jesus, the Trinity, salvation by faith alone. Open-handed issues might be important

but we can disagree on them and still have fellowship, such as music style, a type of outreach, etc.

- Many churches are divided because every issue is put in a closed-hand and there is no room for disagreement

## **2) Lack of Trust.**

- Constantly being suspicious of one another or believing that other people in the church have an agenda will prevent love from being displayed in a church.

## **3) No clear direction.**

- This happens when a church is not unified around a vision or mission, which results in everyone having a vision or mission for the church in their mind.

## **4) Pride.**

- The desire to have everything their way and the church never agrees and never loves each other in a way the world can see.

The greatest and most powerful evangelistic strategy we could have is love for one another.

## APPENDIX 3

### CONNECT GROUP STUDY SERIES

#### **Session 1: Community**

**Lesson Goal:** The goal of this lesson will be for Connect Group leaders to see the necessity and importance of biblical community in their lives as Christians. This will be achieved by studying Paul's image of the church as "the body of Christ."

**How to use this Lesson:** You have been provided with a complete manuscript of the lesson. However, do not feel "nailed down" to the manuscript. The main part of the lesson is the content. Several questions are included to lead your group in a discussion of the material.

**Lesson:**

**Introduction:** Ask, **What has God used in your life that has made the biggest impact on your spiritual growth?** There will be numerous answers to this question. Examples would be Scripture, prayer, trials or suffering, circumstances and experiences. Someone in the group may say "the church" or "other Christians". This is a good segue into the lesson. If no one provides answers that deal with the impact of other Christians, then you may want to move onto the follow-up question **What impact have other Christians or the church had on your spiritual growth?** After a few minutes of discussion, transition toward the lesson.

**Move toward lesson content:** Say something like, **this morning we are beginning a four-week series that will look at the role of community in our lives as Christians. One of the greatest gifts that God has given to us as Christians is the church and the relationships we have with other Christians. While the Bible clearly says that we have an individual relationship with Jesus, the Bible is also clear that such a relationship should not take place apart from other Christians. To put it simply, if we are going to be the people God wants us to be then we need each other. Sanctification is a community project.**

**Lesson Content:** The Bible study portion of this lesson will focus on 1 Corinthians 12:12-31. Ask class members to open Bibles to the passage. It would be a good idea to have extra Bibles available for those who do not have one.

**Ask someone in the group to read the passage**

**Say, When Paul talks about the church he will use several images, the most popular is that the church is "the body of Christ."**

Share with the class some or all of the material from the **“For the Teacher”** box. Specifically, the idea that Paul is giving Christians a picture of what each church should look like.

Direct the groups attention to 1 Cor 12:13. Say: **Paul mentions the Holy Spirit twice in v. 13. The phrase “For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – Jews, Greeks, slaves or free”, Paul is talking about the moment we are converted. At the moment of conversion we are baptized with the Holy Spirit. But notice Paul says more than that. We are baptized in the Spirit “into one body.” Paul is saying that not only do we receive the Holy Spirit when we are saved, but we also become a part of the universal body of Christ.**

**Ask: According to verse 13, when do we become a part of the universal church?** The answer is “When we become a Christian.” **As a follow-up ask: If that is true, then practically what should we do?** Wait to see if group members can come to the practical conclusion. The answer is that “we should join a church.” If we are a part of the universal church, then we should join a local church, because the local church is an expression of the universal church.

Show your class that this is the pattern in the New Testament. When someone becomes a Christian, they become a part of a body of believers. Turn to Acts 2:41-47 as an example. The three thousand who were saved actually joined the church. **Ask your class: What is it in Acts 2:41-47 that shows us these people actually became a part of the community of faith?**

Two things stick out: 1) The words “added”. Meaning they visibly were added to the church. There were more than three thousand people hearing Peter preach and the three thousand who were saved must have aligned themselves with the church in such a way that it was clear who was “added” and who was not. 2) Notice what they all begin to do. These people, along with the entire church began to devote themselves to certain things, caring for each other, and regularly attended worship in large & small gatherings.

Also, the overwhelming majority of Paul’s letter are written to churches, not individuals (Philemon and Jude are written to individuals, but those also have a corporate emphasis. Philemon is also for the “church” that apparently met in his house, v. 2, and Jude focuses on sound teaching within the church).

Say: **God is telling us that we are saved for community. However, we typically emphasize our own individual relationship with Jesus. While it is true that we do have an individual relationship with Jesus and individually people need to repent & believe in the gospel, real Christianity will drive us to relationships with other believers in the church.**

**Ask: Do you think there are any dangers in emphasizing our own relationship with Jesus over being a part of the body of Christ?** There are several answers for this. One real danger is that our focus on us as individuals has caused many to have a view of the church that sees the people as consumers and the church as dispensing whatever people



need. This is why so many churches struggle with the same amount of people doing the overwhelming majority of the work. Many people think they can simply go to church, take everything in and leave, thinking that is biblical. However, Paul has a totally different view of the individual's role in the church.

Have someone in the group, or yourself, read 1 Corinthians 12:14-31. Ask: **What is Paul comparing every Christian in the church to? Parts of the body.** Remember, Paul is giving us a picture of what Salem Baptist Church should look like. Ask: **Based on what Paul says here, how should churches function? Everyone should be involved.** God gives to every believer gifts and abilities to use in the body. Earlier we mentioned the consumer mentality that many people have about church, **how does a consumer mentality (coming to get something rather than contributing) hurt the church?** The members of the class need to see that everyone loses in this scenario. The church is hurt because it is hindered in achieving its mission because parts of the body are not contributing. And, those members who are simply coming to receive have hindered their spiritual growth, because we will not grow as Christians unless we are playing our part in the body of Christ.

Ask: **What are some ways we can begin to remove the consumer mentality from our church?** One obvious way is to strengthen the idea of what it means to be a church member. However, another step forward in this process is to stop thinking of the church as something you go to and begin to see it as something you are. Christians are the church, they are the family of God. Ask your class if they believe that **thinking of the church as something they go to has a negative impact on our church. If they agree, why?**

Say: **Paul is telling us how we should look at ourselves in this passage. We are the body of Christ. It is our identity, who we are in Jesus. Christians are the church and the church is their true family (now & for eternity). Christians who do not feel that the church is their family should first look to their involvement with the church. Are they consuming or are they contributing to reach the world and make disciples?**

Ask: **If we really are the body of Christ, then how should that impact the way we treat each other?** Verse 26 is a great example. Walk your group through this verse.

Ask: **What should we do when one of our brothers and sisters in Christ is hurting?** Try to think of practical examples such as, a member in our church losing their job, receiving a devastating diagnosis earlier in the week, problems at home, etc. What do you think it would look like to “suffer together” with these people? **What should we do when one of our brothers and sisters in Christ is honored?** Practical examples would be getting a new job for the unemployed individual, a teenager getting into the school he or she hoped they would, parents of a newborn. How should we rejoice with people?

Say: **On the opposite side is that for people to know our hurts and our joys, we have to share them. Why are we so hesitant to open up about these things with people we worship with?** Look for several answers. After a moment of discussion, ask: **What does our hesitancy to share these things with people say about our view of the**

**church?** At one level, it shows that we think we do not need the people around us. We may spiritualize it by saying “God knows and that is enough”, however he is saying the opposite in his word. Yes, he does know, but he has brought us into the body of Christ as a visible expression of his care for us.

**Ask: Do Paul’s words have any impact on unity in the church? If so, what?** Body parts don’t try to stage a mutiny against other body parts. They are united. Body parts should work together for the common goal of caring for and building up the body. What should unify Christians is the gospel that saved them and the call from Jesus to get the gospel out & make disciples. For our church, this is best seen in our mission statement “Salem Baptist Church exists to see Gospel Transformation in our church, into our city, and to the corners of the earth.” Every part of the body should work together to fulfill that goal.

**Close: When Paul tells us that we are the body of Christ, he is telling us how to think about ourselves. We are not Christians who go to church. We are the church. Ask: What are some ways that our Connect Group can look more like the body Paul describes in this passage?** Think of some practical ways and strategies to implement some of what the class says.

Close in prayer that our church would look more and more like the body Paul describes in the passage we studied today.

## **Session 2: One Another**

**Lesson Goal:** After learning about the importance of community by focusing on the image of the church as “the body of Christ”, now we will focus on how Christians should act toward one another. The New Testament uses the phrase “one another” sixty-five times, Paul uses the phrase forty-three times, more than any other author. This lesson will give your group an overview of how God wants us to interact with each other so that we increasingly become the community he wants us to be.

**Just a quick reminder:** As in the last session, you’ve been given more material than you could teach in the Connect Group time. Don’t feel like you have to get everything in. Focus on the main point of the lesson, see how God uses the material in your particular group – there may be an aspect they need to focus on more in depth.

**Lesson:**

**Introduction:** Ask: (take your time with these questions. There will be numerous answers) **In your mind, what would the perfect church look like? How would people treat others? What can keep a church from experiencing what you just described?** Say: Last week we got a picture of what the Bible teaches about community. This morning the Bible is going to tell us how to treat each other so that what the Bible teaches can be more of a reality here. Sixty-five times, the New Testament uses the phrase “one another”, Paul uses it forty-three times.

Lesson Content: The lesson for this session will have the class focus on various “one another” texts

Move toward lesson content: Say something like, **Open your Bible to 1 Corinthians 12:25. This is the passage we were in last week and you can see Paul use the phrase in this verse. The “one another” verses tell us how to be the body of Christ God wants us to be.**

To give your class an idea of what some of the “one another” verses look like, have your class look up some or all of the following verses. **Don’t underestimate the significance of this part of the lesson.** The Word of God is living and active and the Spirit uses the Word in God’s people. Don’t see this as merely looking up verses. Take as much time as your group needs in this part of the lesson:

John 13:34-35; Galatians 5:13, 6:2; Ephesians 4:32; Colossians 3:9, 13, 16; 1

Thessalonians 5:11, 15; James 4:11, 5:9, 16

Ask, **Which of these verses stood out to you the most?**

**Why did that verse get your attention?**

**Which one do you find the most difficult? Why?**

Say, **As a church, we should strive to look like what the Bible describes. We may read that & think “what kind of church really looks like that?” And we should be honest and say that no church resembles all of the one another passages perfectly all the time. The best picture of a church that experienced the love and care the “one another” passages describe is the church in Acts (we should also keep in mind they had problems as well, read Acts 5 for an example).**

**Look at Acts 2:42-47.** Several things are significant in this passage that would be good for your class to see. V. 41, three thousand people are saved and “added” to the church. The first thing the Holy Spirit inspires these new Christians is to “join” this church. Joining for them would look differently than it does for us, but don’t miss that the 3000 who were saved took some kind of step to distinguish themselves from the rest of the crowd and they were added to the church.

Have your class read verse 46. Say, **What does this verse say were the two places the Christians gathered together?** The answer is temple & homes.

Say, **The early Christians saw the need to have a larger gathering of Christians and then a smaller gathering of Christians. Ask, Do you think both are needed today?** Members of your class should see the importance of both. Make sure to stress to your group that we are not picking one over the other, but both have a distinct and important purpose.

As a follow up ask them why they think both are needed? Say, **These verses aren’t giving us the equivalent of our morning worship service and Connect Groups, but we do see that the church thought both were important.**

Ask, **What is the purpose of our Sunday morning worship gathering?** Several answers will be given such as worshipping God, glorifying God, hearing the Word preached. Now ask your group, **What is the purpose of our Connect Groups?** Listen to what your group says, after a while, tell them **The purpose of Connect Groups is to connect people to God, each other, and our church.**

Ask, **How do Connect Groups connect people to God?** By studying his Word in a small group and helping each other apply it. **How do Connect Groups connect people to each other?** Because people will build relationships in Connect Groups. The morning worship service is not designed to help people build relationships with other people because there is little to no interaction and the size of the crowd prohibits relationships from forming in away that they can in a Connect Group. **How do Connect Groups connect people to our church?** Visitors and new members will build relationships with people that will lead them to “stick” with us. Say, **Whatever may have initially led you to Salem Baptist, the thing that will keep you here are the relationships you build with other people.**

Read Acts 2:42 and 4:34, Say, **These verses give us a look at what life looked like for the early Christians.** Ask, **Based on what we see from these verses, how did the early church live out the one another passages we read earlier?** Several answers will be given, look for talk about the early church caring for one another, the Word of God was central for them, they were obedient to Scripture.

Say, **Let’s think specifically about this group.** Ask, **What are some ways our group can begin to look more like the one another passages?** Listen for very practical suggestions, you as the leader may want to think of some prior to the lesson. Once your group has given some suggestions, plan how you will begin to do them (example: you may plan a group outing, you may plan to send cards weekly to those who are not present, you may plan a morning to have breakfast together, or pray for one another about issues group members are struggling with).

Say, **We should not only try to be a “one another” group, but also a “one another” church.** Ask, **Is there another Connect Group in the church that we could serve and care for?** Pick one or two other groups (it can be adults, teenagers, or children) and plan something to do for that group (example: make breakfast for them and surprise them with it one morning, send everyone in that group a card letting them know your thankful for them).

Close: Say, **The only way we can love and care for each other like this is by the Holy Spirit working through us. Let’s ask God to forgive us for whatever may be keeping us from this and to give us the strength to be the kind of Connect Group and church that Jesus is calling us to be.** (This closing is important, because it would give the wrong impression that we can be this kind of church in our own strength. Only God can do this through us)

### **Session 3: Gospel Transformation in our church through Connect Groups**

Lesson Goal: The last two lessons in our “Community” series will show how Connect Groups help us accomplish the mission statement of our church. The first part of our mission statement says “Salem Baptist Church exists to see Gospel Transformation in our church”. Gospel Transformation in our church focuses on what is theologically called progressive sanctification, the process of becoming more like Jesus. Today your group will see that God has designed our growth as Christians in relationship with each other.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 3:18 and Hebrews 3:12-13

Lesson:

Introduction: Say: **So far in our “Community” series we’ve learned how we are the body of Christ and the way to be the body of Christ is to practice the “one another” passages of Scripture. Hopefully it is clear how Connect Groups are key to us experiencing the kind of community God calls us to in His Word. Starting today and then next week when we wrap up our series, we will see how Connect Groups help our church accomplish our mission statement.**

It would be a good idea to ask your group if they know what our mission statement is. Our mission statement is **“Salem Baptist Church exists to see Gospel Transformation in our church, into our city, and to the corners of the earth.”** Ask: **Why is our mission statement important?** Several answers can be given – It reminds us of what our goal should be, it helps clarify what we as a church hold most important, it should give direction to our ministries and what we do.

Say, **This morning we are going to talk about the first part of our mission statement “Gospel Transformation in our church.”**

Lesson Content: Have your class turn to 2 Corinthians 3:18, ask someone to read the verse.

Say, **If you are a Christian, the transformation that this verse is talking about is happening to you right now. Theologically this is called sanctification.** Ask your class if anyone can define sanctification. You can tell them that sanctification can simply be defined as “the process of becoming more and more like Jesus.” Say, **The first part of our mission statement is about two things: 1) People coming to Christ for the very first time and 2) The members of our church continuously growing and becoming like Jesus (our sanctification).**

Highlight for your class the part of the verse which says that we are “being transformed.” Say, **Paul is telling us that growth as a Christian is a process.** Ask, **Why is that encouraging?** There are several different answers, but it is encouraging to know that sanctification or growth is a process because it helps us to make sense of all the times we fall short.

Say, **David Powlison gives a great picture of what growth as a Christian looks like. He says, “The Christian life is like a man walking upstairs with a yo-yo.”** What he

**means by that is that there is constant progress (going upstairs) and constant struggle (the ups & downs of the yo-yo).**

Ask, **Who is it that ultimately is in charge of our sanctification?** God is the answer. As a follow-up question ask, **What role do we have in our sanctification?** Have your class turn to Philippians 2:12-13. You will see both of these questions reflected in the verses. Say, **When Paul tells us to work out our salvation, he is not telling us that we need to work to be saved. Only Jesus saves us. Instead, he is saying that if we truly are saved, we will begin to do certain things. We will begin to work. “Work out your salvation” is a command for us to grow as Christians. What are some ways we can “work out” our salvation?** There will be a lot of different answers to this question, from fighting sin to reading the Bible.

This is a turning point in the lesson as we focus on the role community plays in our sanctification.

Ask, **What role do we play in each others sanctification?** Your class may struggle with answering this, that is okay. The role of other Christians in our own sanctification is not something that we think about often. Say, **We can grow as Christians on our own, but God also intended for our sanctification to happen in the body of Christ, as we help each other grow.**

Say, **Let’s look at an example from Scripture of how God wants us to be a part of the sanctification of the people in this group.** Have your class turn to Hebrews 3:12-13. Say, **In 7-11, the author is talking about how Israel hardened their hearts under Moses and it resulted in them not entering the promised land. The author of Hebrews is calling Christians to make sure that their hearts do not become hard.** For all teachers, notice that this is a “one another” passage.

Say, **These verses show us two things we should be doing for each other as a Connect Group to help each other grow. We should care for each other (v. 12) and we should encourage each other (v. 13).**

Ask, **What kind of care does verse 12 say we should give for one another?** The basic answer is that we should help each other watch the other one’s heart. Jeremiah 17:9 says “the heart is deceitful above all things.” Therefore we need other Christians to help us watch our own hearts. We should help each other with areas of sin in our lives. Ask, **What are some ways that we can provide this kind of care for one another?** Look for several different answers, here are some to highlight yourself if the class does not bring them up:

**In order to provide this kind of care, we need to share areas of struggle with the group.** Areas in our families, areas in our own lives. Doubts we are struggling with, fears, and joys. Ask, **What keeps us from sharing these kinds of things with each other?** Fear of opinion and how others will respond will likely be common themes. **How can we overcome these fears as a group?**

Also highlight that another way to care for each other like this is to intentionally reach out to those who are not present. If your group doesn't have a formal plan in place to reach out to people who are absent, take some time at this point in the lesson to plan and implement one.

Say, **The encouragement in verse 13 is very close to the care in verse 12. It is encouragement to keep going in the Christian life. Why would we need other Christians to encourage us in our sanctification?** Because there are times when we are tempted to give up, there are times when sin is hardening our heart, or we are struggling because of a life situation and we need other Christians to help us keep going. On the opposite side, we also need Christians to encourage us to keep going when life is good, and our perspective has shifted from an eternal one to a temporal one.

Ask, **If God intends for us to help each other grow by caring for and encouraging one another, what are some things that can keep our group from what He intends?** Some answers could be socializing (talk about this if it is an issue in your group), a lack of openness, not feeling that the group is a "safe place" to share life

Close:

Try to apply this as much as possible to your group.

Ask, **What are some things we as a group can do to start caring and encouraging each other like this?**

You may want to ask as a follow up, **What do you think keeps us from what the Bible is describing?**

Be sensitive to visitors, but you may want to close the group time by praying for one another or asking if there are needs that people did not share at the beginning, but in light of the lesson, want to ask others to pray about.

### **Lesson: Gospel Transformation into our city and to the corners of the earth through Connect Groups**

Goal: The final lesson in our "Community" series will help your group gain a picture of how the entire group can get the gospel out and see people come to Christ. Many times, we think of evangelism as an individual activity, and while that is true, one of the most powerful tools in evangelism is people seeing the transforming work of the gospel on the community of people who make up the church.

Two things will be accomplished in this session: 1) We want to familiarize our groups with the content of the gospel and 2) the group will see that because the gospel is what makes us the church, one of the most powerful evangelistic tools is the church being a different people.

Scripture: Several passages of Scripture will be looked at in this final lesson. Several will be studied as we talk about the gospel. Also, Matthew 5:13-16

Lesson:

Intro: Say, **We have spent the past three weeks talking about the importance of Community in our lives as Christians. This morning we are looking at the last part of our mission statement “Gospel Transformation . . . into our city and to the corners of the earth.” Obviously, at this point we are talking about evangelism. Ask, What are some ways that we can get the gospel out into our city & world?**

Obviously there will be a lot of different answers here. After a few moments ask as a follow up question, **How can the church simply being the church be evangelistic?**

There may not be many answers to this question. This question is really meant to turn to the content of the lesson.

Content: Say, **When we think about evangelism, a lot of times we think about it as something that we do as individuals (& that is a part of it), or something the church emphasizes through special events or programs (& again, that is a part of it). But something we may miss is that the church is evangelistic by simply being the church.**

Have your class turn to Matthew 5:13-16 & ask someone in the class to read it.

Ask, **Who is Jesus talking to in these verses?** The answer is the disciples. If your class is not aware of Jesus’ audience, have them turn to Matthew 5:1 and they will be able to see it. Bring out to your class that Jesus is talking to the disciples. So his primary audience is to a group and not simply to individuals. This passage is calling individual Christians to be salt and light in the world, but we should not miss that it is talking to the corporate church. Together we are salt and light.

Say, **Jesus is telling us that the church is to be salt and light in the world. We will talk more about this in a minute, but for now it is enough to say that Jesus is telling us that we should be different from the world. Ask, What has made us different than the world?** The essential answer is the gospel. Your group may say Jesus or any number of answers, but make sure that their answer is basically the gospel.

Ask, **If someone were to ask you “what is the gospel?”, what would you say?**

Someone in your group may give the correct answer, but far too many Christians will not have an adequate answer for this question, simply saying “God’s love”, or “God has a great plan for your life”, or they may be unsure of what exactly the content of the gospel is. Take the appropriate time to walk your group through this section.

Divide the following verses up in your group for people to read at the appropriate time: Revelation 4:11; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; 2 Corinthians 5:21; Romans 8:1

Say, **The gospel starts with God. Ask, What are some characteristics God tells us about himself in the Bible?** Characteristics such as love, patience, etc., will likely be mentioned. Spend time talking about God as our creator.

Read Revelation 4:11. Ask, **Why is God being worshiped in this verse?** He created all things is the answer. Tell your class that because God is our creator, he made us to live for him and to live his way (If you need to clarify this point, read Isaiah 43:7).



Read Romans 3:23. Say, **But sin has separated us from God.** Ask, **What is sin?** Here is a definition of sin from theologian Wayne Grudem, sin is “any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, attitude, or nature.” Ask, **What does it mean that our sin has separated us from God?** It means that his wrath is against us. He has to judge sin because he is holy (perfect). We can’t do anything to work our way to God (read Romans 3:20 for this point). Even our religious efforts gain us nothing in the sight of God.

Read Romans 6:23. Say, **Notice the word “wages”, what is a wage?** It is what you earn or deserve. Say, **When it says that the wages of sin is death, it means that what we deserve because of our sin is death, physical & eternal death in hell. But, because God chose to love us, He sent Jesus so that instead of getting what we deserve, we can have eternal life.**

Read 2 Corinthians 5:21. Say, **This verse is basically telling us that Jesus took our place. He lived the perfect life we never could and he died on the cross for us. When Jesus died on the cross, he took all of our sin on himself. And if we confess to God that we have sinned, ask God to forgive us for our sins, and submit to Jesus as our Lord, we will be saved (Romans 10:9-10).**

Read Romans 8:1. Say, **Because of what Jesus did for us, once he saves us there is no condemnation from God toward us at all.**

Ask, **Once Jesus saves us, what begins to happen to us?** There will be several answers here. The majority of them will speak of the fact that He begins to change us. The point of this question is that it serves to tie this lesson together with the others. Once Jesus saves us, he makes us a part of his community of people, the church. We begin to love “one another” and act like the church.

Say, **Once Jesus saves us, he makes us a part of the church. The gospel is what makes us different. This brings us back to Matthew 5:13-16. Jesus is telling us that the church is to be salt and light in the world. Both of these images show the church impacting the world.**

Ask, **Why do you think the church has so little effect on the world at large today?** Some answers will be that the church has compromised in a lot of areas. Others may say that the church has retreated from the world, talking about being a positive influence in the world behind the walls of the church, but blending in once the church separates after worship.

Say, **We have to be intentionally evangelistic as individuals and the church has to have an intentional outward focus, but we are to be intentionally evangelistic by simply being the church.** Ask, **How can we being the church be evangelistic?** There will be several answers here. A particular answer to highlight is:

**We should invite the lost to be around us and see how we interact with each other.**

Ask, **How could this be evangelistic?** Think back to the “one another” passages. When people see us forgiving each other, encouraging each other, bearing one another’s burdens, they are seeing the impact the gospel has had on us.

Something to think about at this point is 1 Peter 3:15, “always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you”. Peter is writing to a church. Yes, we should be ready to answer questions people may have about what we believe, but Peter is talking to a church and telling them that lost people will get around them and see the hope they share and start to ask questions.

Say, **This doesn’t mean we should not verbally share the gospel with people. We have to, the gospel is news that is meant to be shared. So we should not try to pick sharing the gospel or living a Christian life in front of people without words. It must be both.**

Ask, **What are some ways that we can invite non-Christians to be around us?**

Obvious answers are regularly we should invite people to church with us. We should also invite our friends and those we know who are not Christians to events or occasions where we gather as the church.

Say, **Another way that the church can be evangelistic is that we should regularly try to be around non-Christians.** This is the opposite of the previous example. We should invite non-Christians to be with us and then we should also try to be with them.

Close: Ask your group, and tell them they do not need to answer out loud if they do not feel comfortable, **Do you know any people who are not Christians?** And this is not merely to be aware of people in our close proximity who are not Christians, it is to know them because they are friends.

As you close this lesson today, ask your group if they would feel free naming a person they know who is not a Christian and then praying for them.

## APPENDIX 4

### CONNECT GROUP MEMBER SURVEY

The research in which you are about to participate is designed to evaluate you current needs as a Connect Group leader. This research is being conducted by Mark A. Combs for his Doctor of Ministry project seeking to develop an effective small group ministry. In this research, you will answer basic questions about the role of small groups in a local church. Any information you provide will be held *strictly confidential*, and at no time will your name be reported, or your name identified with your responses. *Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw from the study at any time.* By your completion of this survey and questionnaire, you are giving informed consent for the use of your responses in this research.

Using the scale below write the number that corresponds to your answers to the following statements.

---

1	2	3	4	5
Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Not Sure	Agree	Strongly Agree

1. As a result of the sermon series and study on small groups, I understand how small groups help our church accomplish its mission. \_\_\_\_\_
2. Small Groups are a vital part of a healthy church. \_\_\_\_\_
3. Growth as a Christian can happen without relationships with other Christians.  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Community is an important theme in the Bible. \_\_\_\_\_
5. Because of the sermon series & study on small groups, I see the necessity for me to be in a small group so that I can discover & use my spiritual gifts. \_\_\_\_\_

## APPENDIX 5

### CONNECT GROUP LEADER TRAINING

#### **Session 1: A Growing Relationship with Christ**

What would you say are important characteristics of a Connect Group Leader?

Spiritual leadership is unlike any other type of leadership. How so?

- Leaders are typically thought of as very self-confident
- Spiritual leaders must be confident in God and not themselves

Jesus' entire ministry was empowered by the Spirit

Luke 3:22; 4:1, 14, 18

This carries over into the book of Acts and the early church

1:4-5, 8; 2:41; 4:8, 31; 7:55

Who causes the church to grow and advance in Acts?

The same is true in small groups.

Effective small group leaders must be dependent on the Holy Spirit and not themselves.

How can we cultivate dependence on the Holy Spirit?

John 16:13-14. The Holy Spirit directs Christians to the person and work of Christ

So, in order to be effective leaders, we need to develop a growing relationship with Jesus.

What are some ways that you've found leading a Connect Group too big to rely on yourself?

What current practices do I have to cultivate a growing relationship with Jesus?

Am I calling my group to do things/live in such a way that I am not seeking to live?

Am I regularly confessing sin and growing deeper in my confidence in Jesus?

Connect Group Leader Training

## Session 2: Equipped Leaders

Ephesians 4:11-12

Why is it important to equip our people for ministry?

v. 16 – The entire body is to be fulfilling their God-intended role

Ephesians 4:12 says it is the responsibility of the leaders to equip people for ministry.

If we are going to equip our people for ministry, then that means we need to be equipped.

What are some of the dangers in assuming that a Connect Group leader is adequately equipped?

- Possibly teach false doctrine
- Take the group in a different direction than the church as a whole is going

Equipped Connect Group Leaders should be equipped:

1. Theologically
2. An understanding of the groups role within the larger vision of the entire church

Why is theological teaching important in small groups?

Colossians 1:28, “Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.”

Why is it important for Connect Group leaders to know the role of groups in our church?

- If they do not know our goal for groups, they could take the group in another direction & have a church within a church



**Connect Groups connect  
people to God, each other,  
and our church.**

This means Connect Groups should stay outward in focus and intentional in equipping.

- This is very hard & takes intentional leadership. The natural drift is inward.

### Session 3: A Biblical Understanding of the Church

1 John 1:7

- if an individual is truly walking in the light they will have fellowship with other Christians.
- Fellowship with other believers serves as visible evidence whether someone has truly been cleansed by the blood of Jesus from their sin.

What can happen to a Connect Group if the Connect Group leader does not have a clear understanding of the church?

They may emphasize the individual at the expense of the corporate.

The church is not optional for Christians, it is essential.

- This needs to be stressed at all levels, but especially for our younger groups

A biblical understanding of the church will also provide the group leader with a proper view of themselves as under the spiritual authority of the leaders in the particular congregation they serve.

Hebrews 13:17

Why would this be important?

- The leader will make sure the group goes in the direction of the wider church, not according to their own vision
- This enables group leaders to stop gossip or dissension members in the group may feel toward leadership and are voicing during the group meeting time.

## Session 4: A Biblical Understanding of the Gospel

What is the gospel?

There are four elements of the gospel to keep in mind:

God Isaiah 6:5

Man Romans 3:20

Christ Romans 3:25 & 8:1

Response Matt 11:28, Romans 10:9-10

What can happen in a connect group if the teacher does not have a clear understanding of the gospel?

- The teacher could point to another source than the gospel in areas where group members need to change and grow.

We should see the gospel as the house we live in not simply a door we go through

Romans 1:15

Who is Paul talking to? - Christians

The gospel is a now gospel.

The problems we face and endure on a daily basis, the gospel can change us in those areas and help us endure in those areas.

Practically, real change occurs at the heart level. We need to point our people to Christ for their need constantly.

How would this look in studying evangelism, communication, money, Christian growth?



## Session 5: A Missional Mindset

Missional carries with it the idea that missions is not something we do or a function of the church. Instead, It is who we are.

- The church does not do missions, instead we are a people on mission

Can you think of some places in the Bible that talk about our mission?

- The Great Commission
- Acts 1:8
- The storyline of the entire Bible

What are some things that can distract a group from its mission?

- Maintaining the status quo of a group or church

What are some things we can do to lead our groups in having a missional focus?

- Look for opportunities to serve in the community
- Reach out to various neighborhoods

We must lead by example.

- If small group leaders expect their groups to be on mission, the leaders must be on mission first.

Pray for the lost by name.

Launch another group from the existing group.

Get our group focused on a task.

As we are on mission together we will experience community with each other.

## Session 6: Understanding the Centrality of Scripture

What are some practical effects a group leader's belief in the authority of Scripture can have on the group?

- It will impact what the leader will teach and how they teach
- It will impact what the leader points his group towards for hope and comfort and change

In a small group setting, if Scripture is not the authority, then the opinion of the group members likely will be.

What's the danger of that?

A subtle example of this can be the question "what does this verse mean to you?"

- It is not dangerous for group members to sincerely inquire about the meaning of a text. The danger comes in forcing their own interpretation on a particular text which that text does not support

A natural overflow of the centrality and authority of Scripture is that we should seek to understand the original intended meaning of a verse or passage.

Here are some questions you can ask yourself to help you determine the original meaning of a passage?

Who wrote it?

Why did they write it?

What is the point?

## Session 7: A Passion for Prayer

Why is prayer in the small group important?

People learn how to pray in community.

Luke 11:1

- People will learn how to pray for every aspect of their lives as they listen to others pray

We need to be strategic in how we use our Connect Group prayer times

- When we pray for the sick, we are not doing people a service by simply praying that someone gets better. God's purpose is bigger than that.
- We should pray for the faith, perseverance, the spiritual warfare that they are in
- How can we be strategic in praying for the lost? Pray by name. We will need to lead the way in this.

The group that does not pray should not expect anything supernatural to occur.

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## ABSTRACT

### DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE SMALL GROUP MINISTRY AT SALEM BAPTIST CHURCH, SALEM, KENTUCKY

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This project set out to establish an effective small group ministry at Salem Baptist Church in Salem Kentucky. Chapter 1 provides the context of the project, the goals of the project and the rationale behind the project.

Chapter 2 establishes a biblical and theological defense for the theme of community found throughout Scripture. The theme of community begins within the Trinity and is seen as God forms a people who love him and want to live with him for all eternity.

Chapter 3 lists several characteristics of an effective small group leader. The characteristics are essential for small group leaders who hope to lead their groups toward experiencing genuine community.

Chapter 4 describes the project in detail. Each step of the project is discussed.

Chapter 5 provide reflection on the project along with several suggestions for those who want to establish an effective small group ministry in their context.



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