

Why do we do house churches?

Pastor Tony has spent several weeks talking about Community – both in the large community sense and the small community sense.

Just to refresh our memory on this – he has been teaching on these five key principles that occurred in the early church (**Acts**)

1. Gathered Together - large and small gatherings
2. Doctrine - agreement around Word
3. Prayer
4. Practical Care
5. Natural Growth

The basic question is how do we Apply these Principles with Balance in our Culture today?

As the elder over house churches – my focus today is on the small gatherings – what we are calling relational groups. Meeting together in this corporate body is vital but the small group is vital as well. We have several different types of relational group opportunities – ladies groups, mens group (with a hearty breakfast), young adults – and house churches.

In the Bible, we are told many times to edify one another. Merriam-Webster dictionary defines Edify –

to instruct and improve especially in moral and religious knowledge : uplift;enlighten, inform
Sounds like the right kind of thing for a church small group to do.

Romans 14:19 says,

‘Let us therefore make **every** effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification.’ NIV uses the word “effort”, KJV says “follow after”, NASB says “pursue” – all active words. Do we make “every” effort to edify one another? Do we even really put in effort to edify each other? Do we actively look for opportunities to encourage each other, build each other up? Effort implies that you have to work at it and not just wait for the opportunities to appear – both to edify and be edified.

Hebrews 3:13 tells us

‘... encourage one another **daily**, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness.’

Don’t miss the word “daily”. Here’s a quick challenge for you to take with you – each day (that is daily) find someone to encourage!!

In **Hebrews 10:25**, says– ‘Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.’

It seems clear that God wants us to gather together - to build each other up; to “edify” others who might need it; for us to receive “edification” when we need it. **Why wouldn’t I want to be a part of something** that is going to “improve” me; enlighten me; lift me up -- as well as give me the opportunity to do the same for others.

I also **don't believe it is optional** for us to be meeting on a regular basis with other believers – I believe it is commanded. I don't see “if you feel like it” or “when it is convenient” in any of these scriptures.

Why??

That is why I have been part of a “relational” group -- house church, home group, whatever terminology you want to use – for most of my life. This is why I put in the time and energy to lead one of our 4 house churches today. Let me introduce the other house church leaders and let them tell you why they are passionate about their group and why they invest part of their lives in leading one.

Introduce the house church leaders

As I said we currently have 4 house churches that meet on a regular basis -

- Tim and Anna Fetterman – meet here on 1st and 3rd Wednesday nights
- Carl and Chrys Hatch – meet weekly in Hatch's home on Thursday nights
- Pastor Gary and Bonnie Stebbins – meet here on 1st and 3rd Thursday nights
- Dean and Connie Wooley – meet in our home on 1st and 3rd Wednesday nights

So, you've heard why we are committed to doing house churches, but why should you be committed to being a part of one?

I asked my house church that question this week and here are answers I got:

- Gives me a sense of belonging
- Provides a common bond
- Know that someone is there when I'm hurting/suffering
- Get to know people on a personal basis
- It's personal and we pray for each other
- Need to have individual relationships
- Edify each other
- Being able to share our prayer requests
- Seeing answered prayer

Again -- why wouldn't you want to be a part of something like this??? You'd be hard pressed to convince me that we don't need these things in our lives.

Here's a cool nugget on how God works.

I had put the next part of this together on Tuesday evening & when I got these answers on Wednesday at our house church meeting – it was confirmation of what to teach today. I think you'll see the tie as we go on.

Reasons for these relational groups

1. You can encourage one another and help each other work through the process of applying the teachings of the Bible in your day to day lives. You can ask questions,

participate in discussions, and hear others share their insights and illustrations of the biblical truths they are trying to grasp. We certainly get some of this in the Sunday services, but the smaller group allows everyone to actively engage with one another and to openly explore what we are being taught on Sundays. We use the Sunday teachings as a starting point for our discussions. And we get to talk about how to practically apply it in the day-to-day.

2. To provide support and care for each other. **Galatians 6:2** tells us “Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.” Fulfilling the law of Christ seems like it should be important to us as Christians.

I’ll give you a very personal example – Connie & I lost both of our moms a few years ago a few months apart and then my dad in October. I’ve been so grateful for the care and concern and support that was provided to us by our house church as we dealt with the physical declines and deaths.

Romans 12:10-15 says “Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn.”

What does this look like - taking dinner to someone when they are sick; giving someone a ride because they need the help; just checking up on each other during the week to see how things are going. This is the practical walking out of caring for each other’s physical needs.

The phrase “one another” is used many times in the New Testament to describe our relationships to other believers. We are instructed to love one another, pray for one another, encourage one another, bear one another’s burdens and build up one another. **Sounds like a good plan to me.**

3. To allow prayer to become more meaningful to you. A key aspect for our house churches is praying together. Praying together and holding each other up in prayer allows us to know that we aren’t going at it alone and that others are supporting us. Also as we share testimonies of God responding to our prayers, it builds faith. We get to experience/encounter the power and presence of Christ and be participants in that.
4. Practicing your gifts - Sunday services and larger meetings like that can be very intimidating if you are just learning about the gifts God has given you – and He has given you gifts. But a small group where you have trust and feel safe provides opportunity for you to “practice” with your gifts. You can help each other learn about

your gifts and how to exercise them. For some of us praying out loud is intimidating but in a group of 10 maybe not so much and with practice it does get more comfortable.

1 Peter 4:10

¹⁰ Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. ¹¹ If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

1 Cor 12:7-11

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

5. Worship together.
6. As we spend time together in these groups you will influence and be influenced by the people in there. Since it is your eternal life that hangs in the balance, seems like associating with people who are going after God would be a good thing to do and a wise investment of your time.
7. Have fun together – eat, socialize, laugh. Good fellowship.
8. To build authentic relationships. Takes time and commitment to develop the trust, honesty and acceptance within a house church but it helps us feel more connected and a part of God's family.

How many of you have Facebook or Twitter or Instagram or whatever you favorite social media connection is? Many of you probably have more than one. How many of you only check your social media account once a week? I'm guessing that most of us check them multiple times a day (some probably even while we are here in church) or else we feel disconnected.

But how many of us are "disconnected" from God's people except once a week while we are here on Sunday? I'm not saying that social media is bad (although it certainly can be if you aren't careful and discerning), I'm just trying to use it as a means for comparing how well connected we are with the people of God. Of course, my hope is that your social media connections and contacts are the people of God, but social media isn't going to meet the need of having authentic relationships. My experience is that to build real relationships you have to have personal contact.

Here's the hard part of these groups – it takes your time – takes your effort – takes your commitment – takes your consistency – it takes sacrifice. You cannot build relationships if you don't invest the time and effort into them. It means you have to actively work at it. We cannot do house church and derive the benefits we've been talking about if we do not gather together and participate.

Today's culture drives all of us to be very busy. The questions we each have to honestly ask ourselves:

- what are we busy doing?
- where and how are we investing our time?
- how much priority do I give to the things of God? (look at your calendar – how much is kingdom related vs how much is other stuff?)

In **Matthew 6:33**, Jesus tells us to seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness before anything else and then everything else will be given to you..

Are you seeking the kingdom of God before anything else – or do we seek other things first and try to squeeze in some kingdom stuff along the way? (I'll let you think about that one for a second!!)

Hopefully you've caught the vision that house church is intended to provide opportunities:

- to encourage
- to love each other
- to be connected
- to help each other
- to nurture each other
- to minister to each other
- to discern
- to teach & be taught
- to heal & be healed
- to preach the gospel
- to worship
- to disciple
- to build up the Church
- to establish God's kingdom on earth.

These all sound a lot like those five principles Pastor Tony has been talking about in his series on community (Remember that was the basic question I pointed out early on!!)... also sounds a lot like to our church's mission - **"Encounter God – Love People – Share Life."**

Our house churches and the other relational groups we have provide a great venue for us to live out community in our current culture.

BUT YOU HAVE TO MAKE THE CHOICE ON WHETHER OR NOT YOU ARE A PARTICIPANT!!!
There are only two choices – participate or not.

In the bulletin today, there is a sheet that lists all our current “relational groups” – who the leaders are, when they meet, where they meet. If you are not in a group and want become part of one, use this list to help you find a group. I’d encourage you to talk to the leaders, explore the different groups and find one that you think will best enable you to learn, to grow, to serve.

I’ll end with this verse -

Joshua 24:15

But if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your ancestors served beyond the Euphrates, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.”