

## Don't Stand Still – house church Sunday, April 7 2019

Once a year we take a Sunday to talk about house churches here at COTR and today is that day. As the elder that oversees our house churches, it is my honor to get to do that. I want to start by introducing the leaders for our 5 house churches. In the past we've waited until after the teaching to do this but today I felt like we are supposed to do it first. If you've been around COTR for more than a few months, you'll know that these are folks who are actively serving in the church in other ways in addition to their commitment as house church leaders. I want you to see who they are and I've asked them to take a couple of minutes to tell you about their groups.

Tim and Anna

Gary and Bonnie

Carl Hatch

Sheryl Sherman – Sheryl started her group in I think it was November

Connie and I

On behalf of the elders and congregation of COTR -- Thank you for all that you do!! You each do so much in this body in addition to leading your house churches. In and of itself leading a house church is a significant commitment but all of you go beyond that and it does not go unnoticed or unappreciated!!

I submit to you that house churches are a vital part for the life of COTR and hopefully your personal life as well. They are a place to:

- experience/encounter the power and presence of Christ
- worship together
- grow as disciples
- learn how to share God's life with others
- help each other grow in our gifting and callings – a safe place to practice with our gifts
- build community
- reinforce & expand on what is being taught on Sundays
- study the Word together & be able to discuss it, ask questions, share your insights
- pray for and with each other – then testify to how God responds
- care for each other's needs
- have fun together- laugh, fellowship, eat

I don't think any of us would debate that these are important things for our lives as followers of Christ and many of them are incorporated into our Sunday services. But on a Sunday our ability to do these things is limited. Those limits don't tend to exist in the smaller setting of a house church with 10-20 people where it is more comfortable and less "formal". Meeting in the same small group over time tends to build a level of trust that you are not likely to be able to get meeting once a week at church. We can get to know each other more personally. I had someone in my group tell me recently that one of the things they appreciate is that they know that what they share with the group stays there.

Scripture encourages us to meet together ---

**Hebrews 10:24-25**

*And let us consider **how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.*

Let me give you a right now example of a reason why I believe house churches are important and why we have them and why we encourage everybody to participate. It is a neat healing testimony

from somebody in our house church. Michael Cheek told me this on Friday night and I asked his permission to share it today. Michael is a humble guy and doesn't like the attention, but he said I could if I kept it low key. Thanks Michael for letting me share and I'll try to keep it low key, but this is good stuff.

At house church a month or so ago, we were taking prayer requests that I send out to the group to be praying over during the week and Michael said he was having some issues with his hip and his lungs. Well putting him on the list wasn't enough, so we put him in the middle of the room and laid hands on him to pray for healing. Michael is a humble guy and did not want to be the focus, but we got him to let us pray for him anyway. Two weeks later, he was going to have some tests done but they were telling him he would likely have to have hip replacement. So we put him in the middle of the room again and prayed for him. We ran into Michael and Ardell on Fri night and the first thing he says is "thanks for praying for me". Another doctor had gotten involved, looked at his records, couldn't explain it - but **there wasn't a need for hip replacement** – he needed some lubrication in the joint which they did with a shot and a minor procedure. Woo-hoo!!

Two things I want you to hear in this testimony:

- 1) Our God is alive and active in our lives - all glory goes to Him. Now we are pressing in to pray for Michael's lungs.
- 2) God is sovereign and could have done this healing regardless, but the house church setting provided a venue where Michael was willing to put himself in what was an uncomfortable place as the center of attention and allow the group to pray for him.

Another thing of note – the second time we prayed for Michael was the Wednesday before Pastor Tony was teaching about "contending for healing wells". Coincidence – I think not!!

It is amazing to me to see the way God orchestrates stuff and lines it up to help us get the message. At our elders meeting in January, when we were looking at the calendar, we put today as House Church Sunday and put me on the teaching schedule. Of course, my focus was going to be on our house churches. But within a few days, I knew that part of this was going to be talking about actively pursuing God. So, I wrote down some thoughts/ideas for this teaching and then I started hearing those same kinds of things in the midst of Pastor Tony's teachings. In the last three sermons from Pastor Tony he has been talking about our role in partnering with God to bring the supernatural kingdom of God here. The scripture he started his first teaching in this series with was James 1:22.

### James 1:22

*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*

Then, when Linda Howard was here last month she talked about tithing and giving to God. One of the points she made was that tithing isn't about the money as much as it is with us giving of ourselves to God and how God will pour out blessing if we will just start "doing". Sound familiar???

Everything I can think of about being a follower of Christ means I have to be actively doing .... something. Our church mission statement is - **Encounter God – Love People – Share Life** These are all active phrases. Our house church hears this from me all of the time and I know I've said it here several times when I've taught in the past -- we can't just be spectators – we have to be actively engaged and participating in bringing the kingdom here. Last Sunday, Kristi Rainier shared during worship about God running after us – not just casually jogging along but passionately going hard after us. We need to have that same passion for going hard after Him. House churches can and should be a source for helping each of us in that pursuit.

Well that's all nice Dean but it means "sacrificing" another few hours of my already busy week. I get that – I'm guessing that we all tend towards busyness. The challenge is to evaluate what we are busy doing and decide where it fits into our lives.

Where does church or house church or your ministry commitment fit into your busyness? Are they less important so we let other things overtake them? Or do you think your presence/participation doesn't matter?

### 1 Cor 12:

*<sup>14</sup>For the body is not one member, but many. <sup>15</sup>If the foot says, "Because I am not a hand, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>16</sup>And if the ear says, "Because I am not an eye, I am not a part of the body," it is not for this reason any the less a part of the body. <sup>17</sup>If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? <sup>18</sup>But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired. <sup>19</sup>If they were all one member, where would the body be? <sup>20</sup>But now there are many members, but one body.*

Verse 18 says – "just as He desired". God - *as He desired* - has put *each of us* in this community of believers (church, house church, ministry, family) and we each have a role and a purpose. But if you aren't participating, you can't fulfill that role and you may miss out on an opportunity to bless and/or be blessed. It's easy to look at the pastors and the worship team and recognize that if they choose for some reason not to show up on Sunday that the service is going to suffer. If Pastor Tony decided he didn't get to sleep in on Saturday so he was going to skip church on Sunday so he could sleep in – he should get at least one day a week to sleep in. Or the worship team decided they needed a beach day together. Yes we'd manage – Pastor Gary or one of the elders would step up and teach, we'd use recorded music or videos to do worship – but the body would suffer because they weren't here doing their part in the body.

You may think your participation and role don't matter, but that's not what I understand from what scripture says - the body is incomplete if you choose not to be doing your part in the body. **AND IT IS A CHOICE you make.** I believe the same is true for your family, your job, your ministry commitments, and for house churches. Are you too busy to bless others and/or be blessed? I know I'll take every blessing I can get!!

### 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."*

Continuing on in the context of being too busy to give up more time for these church things -- I'd ask you to consider what you are busy doing and how does it compare to serving the Lord and partnering with Him in bringing the kingdom of God to earth – which is what Pastor Tony has been talking about the in the series he has been teaching. And this isn't just about house church – it is about everything we do. And it happens more often than daily – who are you going to serve is a choice you have to make many times every day. With each action/reaction, with each word I speak - what am I doing and who am I serving by doing it? Is this going to have a positive or negative impact on the kingdom of God? These are pretty lofty questions, but I encourage you to make them part of your mindset.

Being a follower of Christ means I have to be following – you can't follow without moving & moving requires effort and activity. But we can't follow Him, we can't pursue Him if we are standing still. At our elders meeting a few weeks ago Pastor Gary said something to the effect of "many ways to move forward but only one way to stand still". This teaching has been stirring in my spirit for a couple of

months, so this struck something in me and I made a note about it. I was going to give Gary credit for it but I looked it up and it is a quote from Franklin D. Roosevelt - "There are many ways of going forward, but only one way of standing still." Don't stand still in your pursuit of God or it isn't much of a pursuit.

Your challenge should you choose to accept it - be a participant not a spectator – church, house church, family, ministry, work!!! Partner with God in bringing the kingdom of heaven to earth in whatever you do!!!

I did ask the house church leaders to hang out in the foyer for a few minutes if they could so you can find out more about their group if you wanted to. Also there should be info in the rack out in the foyer that gives you the info about our house churches as well.

One last scripture I'll leave you with –

**Colossians 3:15-17**

*Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.*