

Why Do We Do Small Groups?

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[0 : 00] There are two things that generally introduce a sermon.

! The first is probably my incessant, repetitious petition that you would pray for me. And I trust that whether I ask you or not, that you do that.

I trust the day never comes when a man stands in this pulpit that you as God's people do not pray for him. It is one of your most significant works during the preaching of the Word of God.

Now having said that, listening to it and obeying it is preeminently important. But apart from your prayer, you are not enjoying the enabling of the Spirit of God in that process.

Secondly, I do want to take just a moment to address the fact that today is going to be a little different because normally after I've made my traditional solicitation for you to pray for me, I then usually say, turn in your Bibles too.

[1 : 22] And if you've been tracking, you know, if you've been here more than one or two weeks in a row, you know that if we were in Ephesians chapter 2 verse 13 on last Sunday, guess where you're going to be next Sunday?

Just a couple verses ahead, because we are deeply committed to the supremacy and the value of the Scriptures to inform us and to affect us as believers.

And as a result of that, we study through the Bible text by text, and preaching for us is an understanding that God has spoken, and those who preach are to bring what God has spoken in clear terms for your understanding and for your application.

And so, there are rare occasions where I step aside to address something in a more topical nature. One of our deacons sent me a, I think it was an email yesterday, in which they were referring to some reading they are doing.

And the reading actually written by a particular author, and I don't know who it was, but the author said that few congregations would endure a pastor teaching through a book for longer than a year.

[2 : 42] And I had to chuckle to myself when I got that note, but then I want you to know that I was deeply affected by the reminder that you have been so forbearing, because generally our studies in a book are not just a year discursion, but if you would remember, our work through the book of Luke, I think, ran into four years, and our work in the book of Romans ran into something comparable to that, not because we don't know what to do next Sunday, but because we are fully persuaded of the sweetness and the value of studying the Scriptures carefully.

And so this morning I'm going to do something a little different in that I'm going to be topical. And my wife, there she is, isn't she the most beautiful woman in this church?

By the way, she's the only one I can keep on looking at. But she will tell me, Tim, you're not real good at topical sermons, let them go. And so, hey, nod your head, you said that.

But I am committed to take the time to explain to you as God's dear, dear people why we do small groups. Small group ministry is not just kind of a side note for this fellowship.

It is sweet. It is important. It is intentional. It is essential. And something that we as a fellowship believe in so deeply deserves an occasional explanation.

[4 : 29] And so, it fits that after the summer break where we've been apart for roughly 11, 12 weeks, it's appropriate for me to come to you and say, Hey, guys, remember this is what we do and here's why we do it.

And so, this morning what I would like to do is actually illustrate a point that is at the heart and the foundation of our effort together. And I've asked a couple children to come forward to help me with that.

Pete, would you come up? You come with Annabelle so that she is not unduly intimidated by the pastor. And then I'm going to ask Sarah if you would bring up Eliab and Calvin.

And if you guys will stand right here. Your parents can stand behind you. Is this microphone on? Testing. That's all right. We're learning to share spaces.

Okay. I'm going to ask each of these young people a very simple question. And I'm going to see whether you know the answer before they know it.

[5 : 54] Okay? Eliab, I'm going to ask you the question. What is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Amen. Calvin, what is the chief end of man? The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. And Annabelle, what is the chief end of man?

Chief end of man is to glorify Him and to enjoy Him forever. Excellent. Excellent. Now, you may go. I told several people this morning that actually I was multitasking when I asked a number of different families if they would consider doing this.

And when I say multitasking, for one, I intend for these young people to serve as a practical illustration of a very foundational truth.

But there's another thing that I intend to do, and that is to encourage you as parents to give some thought to basic instruction in the Scriptures. Guess where?

[7 : 07] In your home. In your home. In your home. What they were doing was reciting the first question. They were answering the first question in the shorter catechism.

Does anybody know what the word catechism means? It means to teach. The word catechism simply in the original language is talking about the process of teaching.

And so just kind of a side note would be this. It's always a good idea as parents to be involved in teaching your children and teaching them from the very beginning that their chief purpose in life is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.

And when you think about that statement that they recited as the first question in the catechism, I have no doubt that most of you were thinking there's a Bible truth behind that statement.

Weren't you thinking that? I trust you were. And your mind probably went to a passage such as 1 Corinthians 10, verse 31, where it says, Whether you eat or whether you drink, do all for the glory of God.

[8 : 15] And over in Revelation chapter 4, verse 11, it says that, Thou art worthy, O God, to receive honor and glory and power because you're the one who made everything.

When we think about the fact that God created us for His glory, we recognize that sin came into the world and perverted and destroyed that which God had made for His glory.

I had in my own mind kind of imagined then a graphic on the screen of some brute because sin created or turned that which God designed to be beautiful and wonderful.

Sin turned that creation and principally mankind made in God's image and for His glory, turned mankind into a wicked, perverse, unwholesome, destructive, harmful being.

Thankfully, salvation delivers us from our past, delivers us from the curse of sin, and takes that which was destroyed by the enemy, and as it says over in 2 Corinthians, it makes us a new person.

[9 : 30] Isn't that right? Any man be in Christ Jesus, He's a new creation. He's something different. Salvation really is a one-time event of grace where God, through Christ, saves the sinner and changes him from being a slave of Satan into being a child of God.

But with salvation, there is another piece that goes along that is very important to understand, and that is that salvation, which is a one-time event and turns us from being the slave of Satan into the child of God, is then backed up or partnered or supported by the process whereby God helps the believer, who is a genuine convert, change.

And a fact should be evident in your life and in your own mind and thinking, that there was a time when you used to be this way, and the Spirit of God is continuing to help you grow.

One of the things that's an indication of the authenticity of our conversion is progressive sanctification, right? We can see that we're not the same as we used to be.

And we recognize, as it says over in Romans chapter 8, verse 28 and 29. By the way, how many of you know Romans 8, 28? More or less by heart. You could recite it with your eyes closed. All things work together for good to those who love God, are called according to His purpose, for whom He did foreknow, etc.

[11 : 02] It goes on into verse 29 and says that He is in the business of taking all the issues of life to do what? What is His principal intent in that passage? What's He doing?

He is conforming me into... fill in the blank. He is conforming me into the image of Christ. The Word of God does not tell us that God's primary purpose in your life is to help you be healthy, wealthy, and wise.

The Scriptures tell us that God's purpose is to make you look more like Christ. And the reason for that is this, is the best advertisement and the best glorification of God the Father is in the person of Christ.

And it follows that as we, by the power of the Spirit, grow to be more like the Lord Jesus Christ, we become better advertisement.

We become more, more adept or more capable of bringing glory to Him. So God is in the business of taking life and using it to help us grow to be like Christ.

[12:10] How does He do that? And that's something that I think is important for us to ask ourselves. We recognize in the Scripture that God uses three agents to do it. He uses His Word.

He uses His Spirit. And He uses His people. Let me say that again so you get it clearly in your mind. God uses His Word. He uses His Spirit.

And He uses His people to shape the believer to be more like Christ. And so, in a more particular point today, the Bible makes it clear that we are to grow in the context of godly relationships.

Do you understand that? Spiritual growth is something that is to take place in godly relationships. And having heard me say that, probably one of the following questions that you should ask is, Pastor, can you show me that in the Bible?

I want to get this clear in your mind. Tim Knoyer, in and of himself, is not authoritative. Do you understand that? It is the Scriptures that are authoritative. So when you hear me say, here's the plan, you probably ought to say, prove it.

[13:20] Show me. Where? Where? And when we think about the fact that God intends for us to grow in godly relationships, let me draw your attention to a couple different passages that would help you see that.

Turn in your Bible to Acts chapter 2, verse 42. Acts chapter 2, verse 42. In that passage, we find the context addressing what the early church did after individuals came to Christ.

And there in verse 41, it says that there were added that day about 3,000 souls. There were 3,000 individuals that were delivered out of the kingdom of Satan and were put into the family of God.

What did they do in the family of God? Well, we find in verse 42, it says this, and they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. What is the apostles' teaching?

When do we, in this fellowship, generally have distinct exposure to apostolic teaching? When is it?

[14:27] It's when the pastor comes up from over here, and he comes, bink, bink, bink, bink, bink, bink, bink, and he says, all right, guys, we're going to do some apostle teaching. I'm not the apostle, but we open the scriptures, and there it is, right?

And so it says that they gave themselves to the apostles' teaching. They gave themselves to fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. And I want to focus just a little bit on that word fellowship because the word in the Greek, koinonia, is not talking about church dinners.

Church dinners are great. And I want you to tell, I want you to know that after a long and arduous journey, our kitchen project is finally 99% done.

Okay? With the wonderful news that our kitchen project is done, I also should advise you all who are parents that over, should I tell them that?

I'm going to tell them that. Over on the wall is a little, in case of fire, pull lever. And if your children decide to experiment with that in case of fire, pull lever, it will create an \$1,800 cloud of chemicals to suppress any conceivable fire in there.

[15:48] Let me say the numbers slowly. 1,800 dot zero zero. Plus.

Plus. Now, why would I bring that up in our fellowship? Just so that when you take your children into the gymnasium, you tell them, on pain of death.

I don't want to be remembered as the father of the child that set off the halon system when there really wasn't a fire in the kitchen.

The sidebar that we neglected and went off on a little discursion on is that, listen, fellowships are really not primarily church dinners.

The word fellowship means joint participation or being interconnected with one another for the sake of one another.

[16:59] And as you look in the scripture, you find that this issue of being in fellowship with one another is supremely significant and supremely important.

Remember, backing up just a little bit, how is it that the believer grows to be more like Christ? The word of God, the spirit of God, and the people of God.

And neither the word nor people are going to be very effective if you have a very minimal exposure to them.

Does that make sense? I need to change still. And the things that help me change are godly relationships in which my heart is being challenged and ministered to by individuals who love the Lord Jesus and use the word to help me change.

Well, let's look at these one another issues because they're very important. And I want to use a sequence in the book of Romans where they're all kind of pressed together. Very helpful that that happens.

[18:13] Romans chapter 12, we see the first of a series of one another commands. Romans chapter 12, verse 10.

Love one another. Love one another. With brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor. Verse 16. Live in harmony with one another. Let me tell you something. As I think about this passage, I remind myself that Romans chapter 12 comes after Romans chapter 11.

And Romans chapter 1 through 11 have really been a very careful exposition by the apostle as to the work of God in saving us.

But following this careful teaching about how God has worked to save us and what He has done in bringing us to faith, it goes on then in Romans chapter 12, verse 16, explaining how we who have been saved are to stay in relationship with one another and how that brings glory to Christ.

[19:26] The starting place is that we honestly, truly have to love one another. And let me tell you a little secret about small group relationships. Small group relationships are much more demanding and also much more opportunistic in giving you an opportunity of really loving people.

It is very easy to be a lobby lover. Do you know what I mean by a lobby lover? Hey, how are you doing? I'm fine. Everybody's fine in the lobby, right? Isn't that the way it is?

I mean, so the next time somebody asks you, hey, how are you doing? And you really dump the load on them, what are they? Ooh, I wasn't asking for that.

I'm just about loving you in the lobby. I'm not going to be praying for you. What are you thinking? You see, small group is where we really get to know each other.

We get to know the uglies. We get to know some of the sulky, pouty attitudes that we all have on occasion, right? Is that true? Does your wife know that you're sulky, pouty sometimes?

[20:34] What's the answer? None of the wives are sitting like this, little halo over top of their heads. Yeah, they know. And if you're in small group over a period of time, people begin figuring out what you really are.

Okay? And in Romans chapter 12, it says, love one another with brotherly affection. Let's go on to Romans chapter 14, verse 13. Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another.

Let us not pass judgment on one another. Then over in Romans chapter 15, verse 7, we find there that Paul says this, therefore, welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.

That idea of welcoming is accepting, receiving one another with our idiosyncrasies and our particular preferences. I remember actually one of the very significant moments in our church life was when that verse got a hold of my heart in relationship to music.

I had grown up on the mission field, and most of the songs that I knew, none of you would understand. They were in Hindi, Manapuri, and Bengali.

[21:48] And their structure and everything about singing is completely, 100% different than what you know. The other part of me spent from sixth grade on in boarding school, and every Sunday I went to an Anglican church.

Now, do you know what Anglican church is like? You know, glory be to the Father and to the Son. And it was very ritualized.

And so I had a pretty divergent view of music in the church, and I thought since we weren't singing all those Indian tunes, that we ought to be doing the Anglican thing.

You know, experience being the judge. And I remember as I began studying the Scriptures and realizing, you know what, God made us with a lot of diversity in what we really enjoy. And it dawned on me that I ought to be willing to sing your song, and you ought to be willing to sing mine.

Why? Because we accept and love one another. Look also, if you would, at verse 14. Verse 14, it says, I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, full with all knowledge, and able to, in the King James it says, admonish.

[23 : 07] In other words, you're there to deal with one another when there are problems. Listen to me carefully, because here's a nice little verse that sits kind of on the frontal lobe for Tim Knoyer.

In Ecclesiastes, here's what it says. It says it's better to be a poor and foolish, a poor young man than an old and foolish king who will no longer hear correction.

Question. When was the last time you took correction well? A mark of spiritual progress is the ability to take it without getting sulky and pouty and having an attitude when someone comes alongside and God uses them as an instrument to say, hey, you need to work at that.

In Romans, Paul talks about admonish one another. At the heart of the some 59 times in the New Testament that the Spirit of God chooses to use the one another phrase to introduce an explicit command, the goal of that command, the goal of that command is the relationship that believers are to have with one another in which they relate to one another either to correct or to encourage or to sustain, support those who are part of the family and the body of Christ.

And so what we do in our small group is we work together to help us really practice the one another's. It dawned on me at one point in our fellowship, in our church life, that we were not doing a very good job actually at helping one another with the expectations of Scripture for the sake of progressive sanctification.

[24 : 58] And the reason was is that the vast majority of time we spent looking at the front or at the back of one another's heads. And there may be a bold one or two among you that may reach forward to the pew in front of you and tap someone on the shoulder and say, I would like to help you with a little bit of admonition.

But for the most part, unless we are developing close relationships, we don't really get in each other's space and in each other's face when we're playing lobby life.

And we recognize, Lord, we need to work at this. How do we go about it? And we recognize, particularly in that passage in Acts chapter 2, that the church gathered for fellowship.

And so if you were to ask me or you were to ask others in our fellowship, why do we do small groups? We would put it to you this way. We have small groups to build relationships that build saints.

That's why we do it. Is it work? What's the answer? Absolutely. Absolutely. It is easier to approach religion a little bit like a drive-thru at McDonald's.

[26 : 16] I'll take a Big Mac and fries with that. Bye. I heard the pastor. Yeah, it's all right. He was kind of at a B-minus this morning, but I'm done.

God intends for the small group ministry to be the practical place where you connect and relate and help other people grow, and they also help you grow.

So let's ask a practical question following that. How do we do small groups? Explain why we do small groups. Let's talk about how we do small groups.

First of all, we rely upon the enabling of the Spirit of God. We desperately need the Spirit's help every time we engage in doing anything of spiritual significance. And I am reminded of what Jesus said over in John chapter 15, verse 5.

He said this, without me, you can do nothing. So it wouldn't be a bad idea, you who are going to be involved in small groups this day, as you're getting ready to go into your small group, go ahead and say, Lord, I need your help.

[27 : 17] I need your help to really honestly love the other people that are in this group, not just kind of go about the civil decorum and act like I'm okay with them. I need your help that I might be a good listener.

I need your help that I would be willing to... I'm sorry, I moved it. But that I would be willing to invest the energy and the effort of really partnering with people for their spiritual growth.

By the way, we rely upon the Spirit of God also in the way we structure our small groups. And I explain that because the way in which we do it is that at the beginning of every year in January, we have a reorganization.

Now, the truth of the matter is that about 90-some percent... Is Tom Perrin in here? What percent was it? About 95%, give or take?

About 95% of our fellowship have stayed in the same small groups year after year after year. And the reason for that is that every name is drawn by lottery.

[28 : 19] Not gambling, but by lottery. It's a little bit like dividing the nation of Israel. Remember when they divided the promised land by lottery? God was the one who did it. And the group will draw out a name and it'll say, Oh, Simons, their first choice is...

And if they were drawn, they get their first choice so long as it's not filled up. And we are very blessed to see that not only are about 95% of our people given their first choice, but secondly, about the same percent, give or take, stay in the same group year after year.

How many of you are in the same group that you started in yea many years ago? Raise your hands. Look around. Look around. By the way, we started, I think, six or seven years ago.

Okay? And we don't force you out of that group unless Providence, God's hand, is the one who says, Up! You got drawn 97th, and the Bernard group was already full.

I'm going to use that as an illustration because it did happen. Okay? We rely upon the Spirit of God to help us. Secondly, we rely on godly leaders who are willing to model their love for Christ and for the body.

[29 : 30] And they work in their walk with Christ, and then they work in nurturing spiritual growth in other people. It is a demanding responsibility to be a small group leader.

Let me tell you something. We are greatly blessed by those men and women who have willingly taken on the responsibility of being small group leaders. They are unbelievably valuable and prized in this fellowship.

And you should never take them for granted. You should pray for them. You should thank the Lord for them. You should be encouraged by their model because they willingly, week after week after week, are there to minister to you, to open up their home, to teach a Bible lesson, to encourage you personally, to care for some of the responsibilities that go with being a family.

Third, when you ask us how we do small groups, we open up time in our church week to allow people to meet in smaller groups. I remember a time in our fellowship where one of the things that I recognized is that we honestly, as a body of believers, did not do well at lasting relationships. And I recognized that lasting relationships take time. And if you don't give time to the process, you can't expect something to happen without the willingness to invest.

[30 : 55] And so what we did was we took away the evening service. And for a pastor who particularly enjoys preaching, did you know I like to preach? I do. For a pastor who particularly enjoys preaching, the idea of taking something away required that I be fully persuaded scripturally that preaching was not the only way to help people grow in grace.

Do I diminish the significance of preaching and saying that? I do not believe so. But I recognize that God intends for us to help one another grow.

And so what we did was we gave away the evening service. And from, well, basically it'll be about 12.15 to whatever time in the evening, we have 10 different small groups.

And they meet at all different kinds of times. Fourth, how do we do small groups? We do so by encouraging consistent participation and involvement.

I want to have you mark those words. Consistent participation and involvement. Let's go back to the presupposition that God uses in order to help you grow in grace.

[32 : 14] God uses His Word, His Spirit, and His people. I want you to recognize that godly leaders pray, study.

They can put all the effort they can conceive into the process. They can open their homes. They can set up chairs. They can even prepare to sing a solo or whatever else.

But if you are not consistent and you don't show up, guess what's going to happen to the potential of developing relationship? Guess what the answer is? Help me here. It's significantly diminished by your absence.

Would you agree with that? One of the things that Judith and I learned a long time ago in our marriage is that if we didn't talk together regularly, often, a lot, Judith and I began to have tone of voice issues.

How many of you know in marriage what tone of voice issues are? Does anybody know besides me what tone of voice issues are? Oh, thank you. We got two here that know what tone of voice issues are.

thinking, you know what?

I guess maybe that's something the Scriptures do encourage, so how do I do it? First of all, let me or the office know that you're interested. And the reason for that is because to have you go to a small group when they already are packed to the gills means that somebody has to sit in the garage and let you have their chair.

And we have some small groups that have more space. And we'd rather have you be with people who, you know, there's extra space. And so, you go to me or you go, Connie, wave your hand, would you please?

[39 : 17] Connie, Connie, Connie, there you go. Oh, that's really high. There it is. This is high-handed Mrs. Bernard. Okay? She is probably the more important person to talk to than me because if you go to me, I'll forget.

But, okay. Let us know that you're interested and we will work to see that you find a place that you can fit in and be part of a small group.

So, what can you do if you're part of a small group? Number one, ask God for help to use the time that you dedicate to Him to help you grow and be an instrument of growth in other people's lives. You know, what a waste to actually go through the motions and not ask God to help you get the benefit out of the time. Would you agree with that?

Lord, I'm going to be in small group from 1230 to 2. I'm going to be in small group from 5 to 7 or whatever it is. And, Lord, I want Your Spirit to help me grow during that time.

[40 : 25] Secondly, be sensitive to the needs of other people in the group. God puts you in a group not so you can be the center of attention but so that you can be part of a larger group for the sake of other people.

He puts us into relationships principally to be a blessing to other people and say, Lord, I need Your help to be important in blessing other people. Be a good listener. Be respectful.

Teach your children to be respectful. I was thinking about this the other day. In the future, let's try this. The next time we have an all-church dinner, everybody listening to me? Why don't we let the elderly go first?

You know, I'm thinking there's a Bible verse that goes with that. Right? This business of children going through first and taking eight legs of chicken or pieces of chicken and ending up with six of them.

The trash doesn't fit the Bible. And, by the way, when kids go through, where should parents be? In line with them.

[41 : 30] Family dynamic. Right? Everybody said amen. Amen. Oh, that's good. Okay. Pastor Saul, I will forget, but the next time the elderly go first.

Right? And I'm not talking about 65-year-olds, in case you're wondering. I'm talking about people that are... I'll stop.

Okay. Third. Pray for your leader and encourage them. Hey, it's hard being a small group leader.

You pray for them. Encourage them. I haven't asked the small group leaders, but I would be curious. When was the last time someone came to you and said, Man, I can't tell you how important you are to me and what a blessing your ministry has been?

Let them know you love them and appreciate them. Finally, be an active participant in your group. Show up.

[42 : 32] Show up. Show up. Some of you are more faithful to a sport event than you are to small group and the church of the living God.

Is that according to scriptures? And what's the answer? No. No. No. Let's close in prayer. Father...