

Why Do We Do Small Groups?

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[0 : 00] I saw that for the first time when I was at Greg Bernard's small group.! The Holy Spirit, who is our gift, who is here, present in each of us as believers, that he would enable me in preaching and he would enable you who know the Lord Jesus in your understanding and then your application of the Word of God.

Let's pray together. Our Heavenly Father, this morning my heart is reminded of the words of Zechariah the prophet where he made this statement, not by might nor by power but by word, saith the Lord, by my spirit.

And so I pray this morning, Lord, that you would work in us, that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, the one who is the Savior of the world, would be the one that is seen and adored and that our affections would grow.

I pray for clarity. I pray for simplicity in declaring the truth. And I pray for passion that the Lord Jesus Christ might be lifted up and worthy of adoration.

And we ask this in Jesus' name, trusting the Spirit to work. And we pray amen. Amen. Now next week is going to be the start to our small group ministry.

[1 : 49] We've had a summer of break, a little bit of a hiatus, a step away. And so next week when we gather together again, we're going to begin where we left off in some ways.

I know that some of you in small groups at different times through the summer have connected together. You've stayed in touch with some of the emails and some of the little details that have helped us stay in communion with one another.

But this coming Sunday, this next week, we are going to begin again in the groups that God has put together in our fellowship. And as we begin, I think it's appropriate for us to come back and take a look at why do we do small group.

And our study this morning in the Scriptures is going to address the why. And then next week in particular, Pastor Saul is going to add another dimension to it, explaining how and what part you can play in being effective in that.

Judith and I are going to be down in the Fort Benning, Georgia area. I have two grandsons that are graduating from basic training back to back.

[2 : 53] And so we're going to be down there for that event in both of their lives, in Isaac's and in Sam's. And we're going to have a wonderful time. We are going fishing. I want you to know that.

Somewhere out in Savannah, the we is a singular, I am being advised, from way in the back. That is, I am going fishing. I was going to get scopolamine patches for my wife.

And she says, not on your life. Anyway, we are going to have a week of vacation or so and enjoy the time that we will spend together. And I want you to be in prayer for us as we have an opportunity to kind of decompress a little bit and prepare for coming back and the blessing of ministry to all of you.

So as we start this morning looking at the issue of small group, I trust that for some of you in our fellowship, this is kind of like review and you can kind of close your ears and kind of zone out.

But I would plead with you that you not do that. Let me explain something. The same passage of Scripture looked at again and again can, by the enabling of the Spirit of God, help you learn new things.

[3 : 57] And I think about the passage in Scripture in Psalm 119 where the psalmist prayed this way. He said, open thou mine eyes that I might behold wondrous truths of thy law.

It's a fair prayer for all of you to be praying this morning if you know Christ. Say, hey, listen, I want to see it again. I want to understand your beauty and your glory and your wisdom and how you've intended for us as believers to relate to one another and grow in grace.

And so given the biblical nature of preaching and our dependence upon the Spirit of God, we are confident that our time in the Word of God is intended to make a difference in your life as believers, and I trust that it does.

So let's ask the question, so why do we do small groups here at Maranatha? Why is it such an important part of our fellowship? Let me say, first of all, that small group ministry is not a fad. Over the years, I've had a number of different pastors in our circles call me up and say, so what do you do about small group ministry? I mean, they've heard the buzz or they've heard the Word at a seminar and they've heard other churches are involved in it.

[5 : 06] And so they'll call and they want to get an idea of, okay, how do you do this and what does it look like? And as I've talked with pastors and talked with board members at various times, one of the things that I've kind of picked up on is that sometimes people come at small group simply as a means of kind of growing numerically.

Others want to try it, maybe just as well. I've heard others are doing it. I don't want to be the last person on the block to kind of pick up on the detail. And so if others are doing small group, it must be a good idea.

I'll go ahead and follow. And others come along and just say, well, I don't know what to do with Sunday night. I don't know what to do with Wednesday night or whatever. And so they kind of throw a program in hoping that the program would kind of stick and possibly even work out and make a difference.

Some had the attitude as, well, why not? Let's try it and see. I want you to understand that our approach to small group is not something that came about because we were kind of floundering around uncertain of what to do, but it came about through a matter of lengthy prayer and consideration, many hours of study, actually, to not bore you with the details.

But for about a year behind the scenes, our pastoral staff researched the matter, did study on it, went to various seminars, kind of getting an idea of what was happening with small group ministry.

[6 : 26] And then after we had spent the time working on it as pastoral staff, we brought it to our deacons, and they began praying and thinking with us. And I can tell you in that year of study, first with the pastors, and then another year with the deacons, and you could kind of think to yourself, wow, you guys are slow deciders.

We are. But the outcome of that is that after having spent a great deal of time thinking very carefully with what we wanted to accomplish with small group, I want you to understand that it has been a significant blessing and a very real part of what makes Maranatha what it is.

It has made a difference in our fellowship. And so as a result of the amount of study and prayer, and now I think we're in our eighth year, I don't remember exactly.

Someone who's better with numbers can tell me that. But I want you to know that we're not asking you to join an experiment. This is not kind of like a lab experiment. We're not sure how it's going to blow up or not, but give it a shot.

We're inviting you to join us in a biblical and a truthful approach to building relationships that build saints. I want to say that again carefully and have it stick in your mind. We are committed to build relationships that build saints.

[7 : 40] Why do we do small group? It is because we believe it is a format and a setting where you as believers, those who know the Lord Jesus Christ, and have come to that place where having been convicted of the sin in your heart, you've cried out and asked Jesus to save you, and you have enjoyed the blessing of salvation and the enabling of the Spirit of God, whereby you can begin to develop very real relationship with Christ and with other people.

And as a result, we say, hey, we want to set a platform or a place where that can happen intentionally. Look at the way you're sitting. Look at the way you're sitting. You really can't do very much at relating very well with the person in front of you, other than telling whether or not they've had their hair colored lately.

I mean, there's not much going on other than that. Do you follow me? Some of you are beginning to think, well, I shouldn't have said that, but that's all right. You can tell me afterwards. The truth of the matter is, is that when we're sitting in rows, it's great for hearing the exposition of the Word of God. Do you know what exposition is? That is saying, thus saith the Lord. But it's not where we have opportunity of getting each other's face and getting each other's place and helping each other with the problems and challenges that we have.

And while I cannot guarantee exactly what you are going to receive individually from investing in our small group ministry, I would hope that the consistent interaction with other believers who are intent in growing in their walk with Christ would, first of all, strengthen your love for the Lord and for His Word.

[9 : 20] In relationship with other people, we learn and grow in a better setting than we do on our own. Do you understand that? We need each other. We need each other.

We need relationships. Furthermore, not only growing in your love for the Lord and love for His Word, but also improving in your personal walk and your prayer life. When other people are around you and are encouraging you in your prayer life and in your walk, guess what happens?

You've got a choice of either moving forward with them or kind of separating from them. How many of you like that little video? We're into shallow groups. We're not going to unpack that. We're not going to deal with problems.

That's not what we plan. We intend for small group ministry to be an environment in which over time you are going to be better known and other people can then become partners in helping you grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus.

Not only that, but you are going to come face-to-face with others who are also looking to grow in grace. And I want you to understand that part of that coming face-to-face with others means that we end up in community.

[10 : 27] We end up in relationship. We end up in a mutually challenging environment where we learn together and grow together and encourage and admonish one another.

So small group ministry is not a fad. It's not something that we decided at one point, well, let's see what happens. Because for Maranatha, when we made a change, it was not just one of those smooth little changes that kind of like shifted over to the left.

I remember coming home to my wife and saying, Honey, I think what we're going to do is we're going to change our music and I'm going to move to small groups. You know what she said to me? She said, Why don't we go to another church and do that?

She understood that change in a church is like, guess what? It's glacial at best. That's 18 inches a year. You know, it's like we kind of move, you know.

We make changes and we're here together. We didn't make a change to small group just as a fad and as a trial. Secondly, I want you to understand that small group ministry reflects our commitment to the Word of God.

[11 : 40] So we didn't do it for a fad. Why did we do it? I want you to understand that we believe God's Word clearly points to nurturing redemptive relationships within the body of Christ.

Let me say that again carefully so you can catch it. We believe that God's Word clearly points to nurturing redemptive relationships within the body of Christ. Part of God's plan is that in the family of God, we work together in redemptive relationships that are lasting, that are ongoing, that are enduring, in which those relationships give us an opportunity to help those who know the Lord Jesus Christ grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

I want you to turn your Bible to Acts chapter 2 verse 42. Acts chapter 2 verse 42 is a passage that gives us in a little single statement kind of the overarching view of what did the early church engage in.

Now, it wasn't only this, and I want you to understand that there were other pieces in it, but here are four distinct characteristics of why the early church met. When they gathered together, what did they do?

In verse 42 it says, And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. What is apostles' teaching? The apostles' teaching is the preaching of the Word of God, and it is at the very center of what we do.

[12 : 59] The reason that the pulpit is not over on the side, the reason that the pulpit is not secondary in importance on this platform, is because at the end of the day, it is from the pulpit that the Word of God is preached for the sake of God's people and for their edification and their growth.

And when the Word of God is opened up, the intent and the purpose of the man that God has appointed is to preach and make it clear so that people can follow along and say, I can see what God means there, and I understand how it's to be applied in my life.

And so it says that the early church, when they gathered together, they gathered together for apostles' teaching. Furthermore, it says there that they gathered for fellowship.

Now we're going to come back to that in just a minute. For the breaking of bread, and the breaking of bread in principle refers to when we celebrate the Lord's table. We gather together around the elements, the bread and the cup, that remind us of the fact that at the very heart of our faith is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ died for our sins.

I want to tell you something. When we celebrate communion, when we take the elements in the process of doing that, we're reminding ourselves of the sweetness of the gospel.

[14:16] Do you understand that? When you take that cup, you are reminding yourself, somebody else died in my place. I deserve death because of my sin, and Jesus died for me.

And when we take that bread and we take that cup, we're reminding ourselves that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. The early church met for apostles' doctrine. They met for the breaking of bread for communion. It said also that they met for prayer. And I want you to understand that that prayer is talking not about private, personal prayer.

Should the believer pray? And the answer is always. Always. I remember earlier in my life reading that, in fact, there are several different places in Scripture that talks about praying without ceasing or praying always, and I remember thinking, how in the world can a person do that?

Can you talk and pray? And what's the answer? I can drive and pray. In fact, there are moments when I am talking and I am praying because prayer is that foundational communion with God the Father.

[15:23] And yes, there is a personal part to prayer, but what is being talked about here is corporate prayer, when God's people pray together. Pray together.

Now let's come back to that word that I skipped over for a moment there when it says fellowship.

For us, when we think about the word fellowship, we have a tendency of thinking about what? I mean, Thanksgiving dinner is coming up? Now that's fellowship, right?

And in the spring, we have pancake breakfast. You know, it's that sort of sunrise service. We love to eat together. Would you agree with that? I've never been in a church that didn't like to eat together. It's like, can you fellowship without eating? I think it's possible, but I'm not sure. But the truth of the matter is, is that word fellowship is not talking about food.

The word is talking about mutual or joint participation. And it is talking about what people do when they gather together in community and help each other in the process of growing.

[16:26] Well, we find in Acts 2, verse 42, that it tells us when the early church met, that this is what they did. And I remember as I was praying, and I'll tell you honestly, the thing that brought me to the point of saying, we need to do something, is I remember coming to the conviction that one of the characteristics of Maranatha was that most of our relationships did not have a lot of depth.

You know, we were great in the lobby. What do I mean by great in the lobby? Hey, here's the phrase in the lobby. It wins every time. How are you doing? The answer is fine. I've never met anybody that wasn't fine in the lobby.

But when they get out in the car, it's where the wheels come off, and their lives have some messes in them. And I realized, we're not getting there. And I began praying and searching the Scriptures, and I was struck by, I actually did a study on the word fellowship, and I recognized, hey, you can't fellowship when you're looking at the back of other people's heads.

I'm sorry. In fact, if you started to fellowship, it's like kind of, you know, if Justin kind of leaned forward and tapped Steve way across two rows, or, you know, Connie decided to say hi to Mary Ellen, it would be a little unsettling for the rest of us.

And we'd say, shh, please, stop. No fellowship now, you know. There has to be a setting for fellowship. Let me have you look at another passage that makes it clear that God points to redemptive relationships in helping us grow.

[17:56] Turn in your Bible, if you would, to Hebrews chapter 10, verse 24 and 25. It says, And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and to good works, not neglecting to meet together, as the habit of some is, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day approaching.

Now, stop just and think for a moment. How can you stir one another up to love and to good works without considering what's really going on in their life? Hey, you come and try to stir me up with the problems I had when I told you that I was fine in the lobby, and guess what I'm going to say?

Whoa. I am into that shallow lobby type of small group. It's like, leave it go. I don't want to go there. But in smaller, closer relationships, it's like, hey, I can see what the issues are, and I want to help.

Hebrews chapter 10 presupposes that the body of Christ is investing energy in interpersonal relationships where some of the challenges and some of the heartaches of life are being played out in real time, and we help each other with those things.

Now, I want you to understand that we need each other to grow in grace and in spiritual maturity. Let me say that carefully. We do need each other. Look in your Bible. You're there in Hebrews, so turn back, if you would, to Ephesians chapter 4, and I want you to pick up on what it says in verse 15 and 16.

[19 : 22] Ephesians chapter 4, verse 15 and 16. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head and to Christ, from whom the whole body fitly joined together 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.

Now, what's the underlying picture that is here? It is of a body like mine or like yours that is knit together and put together in such a fashion that it all works well, and in that working, it actually helps the body grow.

I want you to understand that you're important for my growth. Earlier last, well, actually it was later last week, one of the members of our fellowship stopped into my office, and we ended up in just a simple conversation, and I stopped and reminded myself of how often that particular individual had over the years come into my office and said things to me that were actually part of my changing and growing in ministry.

I needed to hear some words of admonition. I needed to hear some words of correction. I needed to learn to be a little more gentle and a little less sarcastic and a little more interested in people, and this person patiently and faithfully helped me learn those lessons without throwing me under the bus.

I need you for my growth, and guess what? You need me for your growth. And God intends that our ministry together and our relationships are enhanced by the fact that we are in this lasting relationship where we help one another with these things.

[21 : 16] Now, stop and think with me of what plays out after it says there in verse 16 that the body is built up. Now, kind of put your finger on verse 17. In Ephesians chapter 4, verse 17, Paul is going to spend the remainder of that chapter from 17 to 32 giving us a broad picture of how in our body relationship we are to treat each other.

Now, why would he have to do that? It's because relationships are messy. Would you agree with that? At the best, relationships are fraught with challenges, and they're fraught with challenges because, as I have often said about marriage, marriage puts two sinners in the same canoe.

Now, I'm glad to have Carrie and Bowman here. Hi, guys. It's good that you've come. Are you thinking about moving back? Come home. Well, Carrie and Trevor are down here visiting, and I think you announced on Facebook that you've been married for, what, five months or something like that?

Four months. You know, it's good. And Carrie was announcing. Carrie is seldom on Facebook. I don't want you to know that. But she was announcing how wonderful the relationship was, and I believe it.

But I've got to tell you, I have never actually bumped into anybody that wouldn't have to admit on the sly that there are some messy moments in every relationship.

[22 : 53] Do you follow that? And it's because of our hearts and our sinfulness. And so here's the truth. We need each other in relationships, but relationships are challenging.

And so here in verse 17 on down through 32, you find that the apostle says, hey, since we need each other to grow, let me kind of run through very quickly, he says, a couple of the principles that will help you stay together.

For one, don't act like you used to. That's a surprise, isn't it? Don't act like you used to. Goes on and he says, hey, listen, you've got to speak the truth in love.

He says, and he says, put away falsehood. He goes on to say, be honest with each other. He says there in verse 26, be angry and don't sin. And then he goes on in verse 29, and let no corrupting communication.

If it's something that is unkind and unprofitable and is not going to help the other person grow in the grace of not, don't say it. But then to top it all off, he says there in verse 31 and 32, he says, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor.

[23 : 59] By the way, what does that sound like? Let me read over carefully in case you're missing it and your translation doesn't have it in there. Look at it. It says, let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor. How many of you know what those things sound like?

Huh? It's the kind of conversations you have with your wife when you're driving home and you're irritated with somebody else. I should have said. You know, it's like a ball, a dog barking at itself in a mirror.

Yeah. Yeah. The apostle, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, says, stop it.

Put that stuff away. And then he goes on in verse 32, caps it off. Be kind. Be tenderhearted.

Forgiving. Oh, and why should I forgive other people? I mean to tell you.

I got the list of things they've done to me. Well, you forgive them because Jesus has forgiven you.

Amen? Where was I apart from the grace of God? I was a sinner condemned to hell on my way to an eternal condemnation justly deserved because of the sin and the darkness in my heart.

[25 : 09] And God found me in that miserable condition and convicted me. Do you know what conviction feels like? It's messy. It's ugly. It's painful.

But I'll tell you, until the doctor says you've got a horrible disease, you're not listening. But when you do hear, guess what he says following up? The Lord Jesus says, and I have the cure.

And what is the cure? God sent his son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to die for my sins. He died in my place. And he has already satisfied the judgment that is justly due to me.

And God says, whosoever believes on the Lord Jesus Christ shall have everlasting life and shall not come into judgment. And here's what it says.

Ephesians chapter 4, it says, hey, stop acting like you used to. And be kind. Be tenderhearted.

[26 : 08] Be forgiving. Because God's forgiven you. Well, I want you to understand also, our small group ministry gives us a setting into which to practice the one another commands.

I'm not going to run through all of them. But the word fellowship in Acts chapter 4, verse 52, where it talks about mutual participation or joint participation, is talking about the process whereby we help each other with the issues in our lives.

Do we have issues? Not in the lobby, but we do have issues. And when we get close to each other, we begin finding out what those issues are.

And as a result of having those issues, the word of God gives us a series of commands that have a one another attached to it. It says things like, exhort one another, encourage one another, admonish one another, love one another, forgive one another, forbear with one another, welcome one another.

And all these one another commands are impossible to do looking at the back of other people's heads. And God's people said, I got that. Understandable.

[27 : 19] So where can you do the one another commands? Before you think about the where, let's think about some illustrations of the commands.

So turn in your Bible, if you would, over to Romans chapter 12. Incidentally, Romans is a wonderful book that takes eight chapters to explain in clear language, first of all, the undeniable depravity and sinfulness of mankind, and then the salvation that we have in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Well, after 11 chapters explaining the matter of salvation, in chapter 12 on, the apostle explains how the body of Christ is to relate. How do we get along?

Chapter 12, verse 10. And I'm going to rattle through these. You stay with me. It says there, love one another with brotherly affection. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Let me tell you something. Genuine love for other people in the body of Christ is not something that happens by nature.

[28 : 33] It is something that happens through the work of the Spirit of God. And if you would prefer not growing in your love for other people, the simplest way to stay dead in the mud is, A, to just not ever connect, B, to just keep on moving.

And you don't want to mean by moving? It's just kind of bopping from here to there and never really connecting because you don't want to invest in the lives of other people. Well, Romans chapter 12, love one another with brotherly affection.

In fact, outdo one another in showing honor. You look at verse 16. Live in harmony with one another. Do you know what it means to live in harmony?

It means that there is a connectedness that allows for things to work well. And by the way, given the fact that all parties in that communion are imperfect, it takes a conscious and deliberate process of

recurring adjustments to one another and choosing not to let the frailties and the challenges that are part of relationship overwhelm you.

The presupposition or the underlying truth is that when you look at statements like love one another and live in harmony with one another, it is not talking about relationships that are in rows.

[30 : 02] It's talking about relationships that are closer together and bring people into communion with one another. Let's look forward to Romans chapter 12, 14, verse 13.

Therefore, let us not pass judgment on one another. Now, by the way, is that easy to do? It is. The first time you hear of something about somebody else, do you stop and think, well, that doesn't surprise me, or do you think, oh, man, that's my brother.

I'm not sure. That bothers me. Here the apostle says, hey, we're not to go out passing judgment on one another. Now, is there a place for the believer when he sees genuine real sin to respond to it and deal with it with humility and tenderness?

Absolutely. But this is talking about that quick judgment where when someone says something, how many of you have trouble with tone of voice? Let's kind of raise our hands if we're tone of voice people. Do you know what I mean by tone of voice?

I love my wife. I love my wife. But what are we, 44 years into this? I am Mr. Emotive.

[31 : 15] Do you know what it means? I mean, kind of ooze relationship and, you know, kind of I'm out there. My wife is kind of quiet and reserved, and she's just, you know, Hawaii 5-0.

Just some of you remember that show from many, many years ago. It's just the facts, you know.

And so she's like, you know, I came home last week from the sermon, and she says, boy, you had a hard time getting started.

Praise God. You know, I said. She tells me what I need to hear, but sometimes here, when she tells me what I need to hear, I play the tone of voice card.

How many of you know what the tone of voice card is? You're immediately suspicious of the other person's intentions because their tone of voice didn't match what you thought it should be. Oh, honey, it was wonderful.

You know, that's what I was hoping for. And so, you know, I said, stop judging each other is what the apostle says. Back up and think the best.

[32 : 18] Romans chapter 15, verse 5. Live in harmony with one another.

Live in harmony with one another. And then verse 7. Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you.

Now, what it is talking about there is actually receiving one another with a warm and genuine affection as Christ has welcomed and received me.

You know, how many of you realize that it's impossible in lasting relationships to not end up recognizing some of the idiosyncrasies and some of the failures of those people that you're in relationship with?

You follow what I'm saying? I mean, the first time you go out for a date with someone, you're enamored with them. But about six years into it, you begin recognizing that they have some eating habits that you wish their mother had corrected.

[33 : 27] Chew with your mouth shut. You follow what I'm saying, right? And the scripture says, hey, listen.

You ought to welcome. You ought to accept one another the same way Jesus has accepted you. I remember a number of years ago when actually we began here at Maranatha to change our music. And I had an individual come to me, dear, godly, wonderful saint, who said, Pastor, I have heard that you prefer hymns. And I said, well, that's true.

I do. And the individual said, well, then why don't we play more of them? And my answer was this.

When we have Sunday dinner at the Kenoyer home, I very, very seldom get to eat what I prefer.

If I were choosing, I would want anything with hot peppers. I mean, that's just, you know, this, in fact, more is better. How many of you understand what I mean by more is better?

[34 : 39] It's like, take it up. And I remember explaining to the dear lady that when we had Sunday dinner as a family, what we would do at that point was I'd go around the table on the given Sunday, and I would, the next person in line and kind of work through my grandchildren, they were the ones who picked.

So what would you like this Sunday? And then the next Sunday, it was the next person. What would you like? And so we had a diet that was reflective of my grandchildren's interests, not mine.

That's what it means to accept one another. Do you follow that? Romans chapter 15, verse 14. I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able to instruct one another. You are able to help each other with the issues of life. Now, everybody smile so you don't miss this one. Everybody smile. Look at me. When it says able to instruct one another, it's making a couple suppositions that I want you to understand.

[35 : 45] Number one, that you have enough of the Word in you that you can help somebody who needs the Word. Do you follow that? Number two, it is assuming that when you see the problem in another person, instead of going and talking to a stranger or a neighbor about, you know, I really wish you'd pray for that, Tim.

I mean to tell you, his sarcasm is over the top. You know, something like that. You know, instead of talking to everybody else about me, who should you talk to?

You talk to the person who you have a problem with, not to everybody else. Let me listen, everybody here. You know what? We would solve 60% of the problems in Maranatha if we just practiced Matthew 18.

And all God's people said what? Amen. Okay? So the next time someone comes to you and says, I can't tell you how irritated I am with so and so, did you go talk to them? How did it go?

Are you sharing it with me because you want me to pray for you, and then you want me to come with you? Listen to me. If you said that about two or three times, guess what that person would begin doing?

[36 : 55] They'd begin finding another person to commiserate with. Paul says this, The thing that I know about you is that you guys have got the word, and you know how to help each other with the problems that they have.

Do we have problems? Yes, we do. And God has intended for other people who are part of the fellowship and part of the family to be part of God's plan in helping us grow.

Now, let's get this clear. Spiritual growth is as essential to a genuine believer as physical growth is to a child. In fact, I was talking with one family who the mom had just had some of the kids to the doctor, and, you know, the doctor would say, Well, your child is in the 87th percentile for this part and the 91st percentile for that part, you know, and they're tracking the growth.

You know, it's like, Whoa. You want to know how it's coming? So we as believers should be tracking how we're doing spiritually. Isn't that right?

Shouldn't we be doing that? Are you growing? Are you more like Christ today than you were last year? It's a fair question. In fact, here's the test. I want you to lean over to your wife.

[38 : 18] Not now. She's going to give you the lobby answer. But on the way home, say, Honey, honestly, be truthful with me. Do you see the evidence of spiritual growth? Now, so that you don't miss it, am I gentler?

Am I more humble? Am I kinder to you? Am I more willing to serve and to bless? Or am I grumpier? So how's my tone with my children? Do you follow that? Don't tell me that you're growing spiritually if you are one of these yard barkers at your kids. Okay?

Well, I want you to understand that spiritual growth takes place as the word of God and the spirit of God and the people of God work together in our lives.

God uses his word, his spirit, and people to help us grow. And so when we moved in this fellowship to develop small group ministry, our intention was this, is to make a conscious and deliberate place where we could rub shoulders with each other.

[39 : 33] Where we could get to know things that are going on in each other's lives so that we can help one another grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

So the truth of the matter is, is that a little piece that's pretty important in the puzzle of small group ministry is we assume that people who are in those groups know Christ.

As a general rule. Do you follow that? And if you're sitting here today and you don't know the Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior, one of the signals that there may be something wrong in your life is kind of a sense of foreboding, a darkness, a sense of guilt and shame.

That is the Holy Spirit that is the Holy Spirit that is work in your heart saying things are wrong and the judge of the whole earth is looking at the circumstances and setting of your life and he stands at this moment as the judge.

But do you know what the gospel is? The gospel is this, that he sent his son the Lord Jesus Christ to die in your place and satisfy your debt of sin. And it says in the scriptures that if you come to the

Lord and say, I'm a sinner justly condemned and I believe Jesus died for me, that he is ready to give to you the gift of everlasting life, forgive you for all of your sins and to remove the guilt and the shame and the burden and give you everlasting life.

[41 : 09] And that's a blessing, isn't it? Is it something you can earn? No. And it's something that the Spirit of God brings you to that point of misery knowing my life, I need Jesus.

And then he answers it by drawing you to the cross. Let's close in prayer.