

The Great Commission Part 2 - Grounding

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Date: 17 September 2006

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[0 : 00] So, last week, good morning everyone, great pleasure to be here again.

As I say, it's just such an honor to be kicking off the new season of Learners' Exchange. And I thought, how better at the beginning of the year for us to look at the Great Commission and what it means for us.

And last week, we looked at the Great Commission reaching out and thought about evangelism and our role in that and how it operates in people's lives.

And so, today, I want to look a little bit more at the next part. After all, something happens when people become Christians, when churches do evangelism and it's effective one way or the other.

There's this irritating thing that happens in that we get quite a great deal more work and people become Christians and so the work just begins.

[0 : 57] That's how it is, of course, in Christian ministry. You know, it's endless work in a way, isn't it? As soon as someone becomes a Christian, then really the fun is just beginning. But, of course, that's what we're here to do.

That is our purpose as the church. It's our joy. And so, it's that second part that I want to look at today. Really, the fruits of evangelism, Great Commission, grounding is how it was advertised.

When I first looked at the thing, I had the feeling I was looking at the word deepening. And so, I want to look at those themes together. What does it mean, having become a Christian, for us as individuals to deepen, get grounded in our faith?

But also, what does it mean for us as a church to be engaged in that work, in bringing Christians into our community? How are we really to welcome them and treat them and instruct and teach them and help them to deepen, to get grounded in their faith?

And I think, you know, as we begin a new year here at St. John's, there is no better place than Learner's Exchange for us to thrash this out. And my deep desire from our two weeks together here is that we should have some very clear pointers to bring to church committee.

[2 : 10] And I know that Sheila will do that for us with great force. If I find out what the organizational structure is, we must be pointing to it. I will be glad to do that. Quite right, too.

Well, we're all in the same boat on that. And as I was writing my notes for you and thinking through this, there are a number of different patterns and models for this kind of thing. And I want to share one with you that I think is very interesting.

But I will confess my hand is that I am, in some ways, just an arch conservative on these things. By that I mean, I find that the training I had in rural Wales was about the best training I think you can have.

That for all the various programs and ideas, somehow there's nothing better than tending to your people and having relationships with one another. It seems to me that is the best place for Christians to grow and to be grounded and deepen.

And it is in our mutual relationships, one with another, that we grow and are deepened. And one of the challenges I do want to put before you is, you know, not just are you deepening and growing as a Christian, but are you aware of people in your orbit whom you are helping to do the same?

[3 : 18] Is your small group that you are in a place, not just for you to find nurture, but for other new Christians to come in and find nurture with you? To argue that the deepening of the individual Christian, the grounding of the individual Christian in the apostolic faith and relationship with God through Jesus Christ, to argue that that is the work of the whole Church, I think, is obvious.

And I want to suggest to this most august body here, the exchange at St. John's, that one of the besetting sins in Western Christendom, but certainly not amongst us, is the intense privatization of Christian faith.

Very often we organize our Christian lives around our own individual growth, our own inspiration, but are we cognizant of the needs of newer Christians for mentoring, friendship, and teaching?

Perhaps an overpowering program mentality. You know, we talk about program churches. We can put on programs for anything, any kind of program.

We can put it on and advertise it and get people to come in. And programs can be very helpful for all these kind of things. But I believe, in the end, that the one thing that makes a difference in a Christian's life is to be laced into relationships in the Christian community with more experienced Christians with whom they can walk.

[4 : 48] Now, I mean, who among us can ever be said to be really mature in the faith? It's a lifelong journey. It is a process upon which we are engaged. Yet, the place that all new Christians belong, and I think, and this is my point this morning, is in a relationship with other Christians, a regular fellowship with other Christians who have been journeying a little longer in the faith.

And I think that that's a range of ways that happens in the Christian community, but one of the main ways is in small group fellowships, that we need to be able to put new Christians, not through a program, but in fellowship with other Christians.

Small group fellowships are such a good place for that. Are you willing to open your life and heart to fellowship with new Christians? Are you interested in opening your small group fellowship to a new Christian who you can mentor and share life with, try to answer questions, and help them along?

Let's think now about the biblical model. The Great Commission worked out in the primitive church. Remember the Great Commission from last week? Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

I remind you that the command is to go and make disciples of all nations. That's what we looked at last week. But then comes this initiating of them in the Trinitarian faith, so baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them the commands of Jesus, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.

[6 : 38] See, so what Jesus taught the disciples, they are going to teach new disciples, the passing on of the apostolic faith. This is perhaps, as I said last week, the most ancient mission statement, the most ancient vision statement of any organization, and doesn't need reworking or relativizing.

It is as relevant and important today as ever. And it astonishes me as well that much of the church today, at least in the West, seems to be in great confusion about what we ought to teach people.

Well, it's pretty clear. We teach them the apostolic faith. We teach them the words of Jesus. We teach them Jesus. But I want to look at a couple of passages from Ephesians 4, 7, and from Acts, just to see what that looked like being worked out amongst the very first Christians.

How did these very first Christians in the primitive church organize themselves for this ministry? Look at the Ephesians as on your sheet. Ephesians 4, 7.

But to each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. And then passing on to 11. It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God, and come mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

[8 : 17] Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful schemes.

Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. Sorry about the typo there.

Speaking the truth in love sounds like a liberal agenda. Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is Christ. I think that's a wonderful picture of what we are about as Christians and what we are about as a church.

See, we're called to grow up, aren't we? To grow up in Christ. And let's have a look. I think that's what Learners Exchange is about. Isn't that the Ministry of Learners Exchange to help people do that through a range of topics and teaching and exchanging?

But notice first of all here that there is a diversity of gifts being exercised in the church. To each one of us, grace has been given as Christ apportioned it.

[9 : 22] Authority for our ministry comes from Christ. And as I said last week, he is the one who is involved in Christian ministry. He is behind it. He supports it. And he gives us this diversity of gifts to exercise in the church.

Quite a list as well though. There is quite an emphasis upon didactic ministry, isn't there? Teaching ministry. Prophets, evangelists, pastors, teachers.

There is a range of teaching ministries. I know David Short has talked about prophecy. Really, it is speaking the scriptures into people's lives. It is not sort of, you know, foreseeing the future kind of thing.

So we have, I think, a list that emphasizes teaching ministry. There is also pastoral ministry. And as we know from Acts, there is also this ministry on tables, caring for physical needs.

But what we want to see is that there are these gifts of teaching within the Christian community, of leading people, of instructing them, of reaching out and evangelizing, but also teaching the faith, speaking the scriptures into their lives.

[10 : 30] We have ministry within the Christian community and ministry without the Christian community. Let's look a bit at Acts as well, chapter 6. I think this helps clarify things. In those days, when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food.

So the twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, it would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. Brothers and sisters, choose seven men among you who are known to be full of the spirit and wisdom.

We will turn this responsibility over to them and give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word. Results, so the word of God spread, the number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.

So you see, there is this role for this social ministry, isn't there, in the church, caring for the needs of people. And so they divide it, really, so that the apostles are set apart for the ministry of the word, to emphasize the ministry of the word and of prayer.

And of course, the result is that the word of God spreads and it infiltrates the temple in Jerusalem. Quite extraordinary, is it not? You know, that happens. I mean, remember the temple of Jerusalem?

[11 : 49] That's the sort of Darth Vader death star of so much of the gospels. And yet, here it is that they, you know, not a generation later, that they are infiltrating the temple for the gospel.

The first thing, going back to the Ephesians as well, that we want to see there, is that the church exercised this diversity of gifts, charismata. They are apportioned by Christ to his people.

They are not exercised all together by the same people. And by the way, they're not meant to be experienced for their own sakes. Ridiculous to get all experiential about the gifts of the spirit.

They are intended to spread the gospel and build up the church. This is about Christ empowering us to do Christian ministry. And of course, this is manifestly our experience here, is it not?

Not everyone is called to be an evangelist. Not everyone is called to teach the word. But we are all called to minister. And it's funny, he doesn't say, you know, now go through the training course Christ.

[12 : 57] He says, Christ has apportioned gifts. That doesn't mean that we rush out on our own and start doing things. Wonderful pictures of how Paul trained people and worked alongside people in his letters.

We are all gifted to serve. And there's a diversity of service. And if we are to be serious about making a difference for the gospel in Vancouver, it's necessary to marshal the resources we have.

And those resources are you and me. Not just the staff. See, we get generally staff heavy, don't we? And that can sometimes lead us to think other people do ministry.

But it's not. It's you and it's me. I am not a great fan of gift inventories. Do you know what I mean by gift inventories, as the English say?

I like that. I don't mean those things that they do for weddings and brides. I mean, in the Christian world, they have these computer programs that you can buy. And some people quite like it.

[13 : 57] I don't know. I'm not a computer person myself. And you type in a person and ask them questions and feed the information into the computer program. And then you get a profile of what your gifts are.

And then you can plug them into the relevant ministry. Some ministers find that fascinating and love spending their time doing that kind of thing. Personally, it's all a bit too organized for my liking. As I say, I kind of go back to the rural Welsh model in my mind.

where we're just glad to have someone kind of heat the church up on Sunday morning. But, you see, I have come to value the importance of recognizing different gifts and passions in people and trying to line them up with areas of service.

So one of the questions I would want to throw out to you as we embark upon a new year of ministry and life here at St. John's is this. Are you exercising ministry? Are you exercising your gifts?

Or are you growing in an area of ministry and giftedness? Are you oriented around serving the gospel in your Christian community? Because, you see, so often we orient ourselves around my relationship with God through Christ, my spiritual life and my spiritual needs.

[15 : 08] Well, you have to meet those things. Your spiritual life is very important. Your relationship with God through Christ is important. But what about serving? Are there people around you who need to be brought along in the faith?

You need to be mentored. Are you deepening? Are you helping others deepen? We want to notice that there is a diversity of gifts and their purposes to serve the gospel.

Make disciples but also deal with those disciples once they've been made. They have to be trained. They have to be taught. They have to be raised up. Then we'll notice the goals of Christian ministry in the Ephesians passage.

And I think this is very important. In Acts, the ministry of the Word is concentrated on and the result is that the Word goes out. Christians are made.

And then, I seem to be crackling. So that's alright. I'll stand very still. But, it's my gifts. It's the power flowing from somewhere to somewhere.

[16 : 11] But then, in Ephesians, you see, there is a purpose behind all this ministry. There is a purpose for all of these gifts being exercised. 4.11, it is to prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and come mature attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

You see the result? Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves. Instead, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head that is Christ.

Isn't that extraordinary to you? You see, it's about preparing the people of God for works of service. I wonder how much time we actually spend on that kind of thing. We have Artizo, which is excellent.

Region College is of course engaged with this. That's what it's about. I think it's interesting in much of our ministry at the church level, we often engage with dealing with people's problems and less with preparing them for works of service.

And I find myself as a pastor wondering what in the end is the more effective thing in someone's lives. What is it that will actually help people along in their lives and to deepen in their Christian faith, to grow and to serve?

[17 : 37] People have very real problems and we do need to help them with them. But I also think we need to be about that work of preparing people for works of service.

Surely that's why we're here at Learner's Exchange, is it not? The things that we share and talk about. We're not just here for ourselves. To prepare the people of God for works of service. But then when you notice that maturity is defined as unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God.

See, that's right, isn't it? The Great Commission is to go out and make disciples of all nations. Then there follows the baptizing them in the faith and teaching them to obey his commands.

We teach the words of Jesus. We teach the apostolic faith. See, when someone becomes a Christian, there is much they do not know. There are many questions, many misunderstandings about God and Christ, the nature of religion.

and so we teach and teach and teach and sometimes very slowly, gradually, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

[18 : 49] Someone once said to me, a wonderful professor said, the thing about theology is you keep on talking until the penny drops. And I think that's quite right with the Christian life, with deepening as a Christian.

We just keep on talking until the pieces of the puzzle fall into place. It is, in a way, a lifetime process upon which we are all engaged. I certainly find as a preacher, I am constantly learning new things and only become more aware of what little grasp of the truth one has.

And yet, God has revealed himself to us and the gospel has definition, it has boundaries, it has limits. There is truth and there is falsehood.

And while no one can plumb the depths of the living God, there is nonetheless a clear body of teaching which is the Christian faith. See, it's a sign of immaturity, isn't it, when people are being tossed back and forth, not clear what the truth is, not clear which way they are going.

It's unfortunate when there is intense disagreement about the Christian faith among Christians. There is a catastrophic lack of such teaching in much of the Christian world, especially our part of the world, which is leaving people immature in the faith, like sheep without a shepherd.

[20 : 08] And so we have a job to do, constantly teaching, teaching, teaching the Christian faith, not just publicly like this, but one-on-one, teaching it into people's lives.

And I wonder, you know, are you aware of that in relationships you have with people? If you've been a Christian for any length of time, you know more about Jesus than the smartest professor who does not.

Do you realize that? You know more about him. We have a job to do. And then we want to notice another thing, that the purpose of this all is to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ, says Paul.

I mean, that is a soaring goal. It is a spiritual goal. It's about us growing more like Christ, having more of him in our lives, in our hearts, in our beings, more of his righteousness, more of his fullness.

I think we often have our sights very low in the Christian community about what we really expect in terms of us overcoming sin and growing in righteousness.

[21 : 21] And we probably have even lower expectations of people coming in the door, you know, who aren't really Christian. And yet, look at that lofty, amazing goal to attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

Now, that's not something you can do on your own. That's why we're in a community. And we need to help one another to do that. We need to be in relationships that help one another do that.

It's not just going to happen in a program. It's going to happen in relationships. It's going to happen over time. And then, you see, we become certain, lastly.

Then we will no longer be infants tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there. We will grow up into him who is the head. That is Christ. Now, that is what we want, isn't it?

That is grounding. That is deepening. To grow up into Christ who is our head. We want people who become Christian and who come into the Christian family to grow up in Christ.

[22 : 22] No longer being tossed back and forth in confusion by this teaching and by that. And that's a big job. It's a long job. And it is the right job.

It is what the Christian community is designed to do. See, it is the work that will stabilize and deepen the church. You may have, we all come from different backgrounds.

Church-wise, some of you probably came from very strong backgrounds. I came from a more local Anglican background and for years never really heard the gospel explained and never really grasped what the truth of the gospel was.

And that's one of the reasons why one gets tossed back and forth. Well, you know, is it this truth or is it that truth? People are not teaching people. They're not going to be certain in their faith.

And again, I think that teaching isn't something that just happens formally. It happens in our relationships. It happens at every level of relationship in the church. We have to deepen.

[23 : 27] We have to ground. Ground ourselves. Ground others. Just as I pause, I want to ask you a couple of questions. First of all, about yourself.

Do you find yourself growing up into Christ? Are you deepening, continuing to deepen and get grounded as a Christian?

Is there more of Christ in you? Is there more knowledge about the Christian faith in you? How's the journey going? Second, are you serving in a gospel capacity to this end?

As I say, I think we often organize our Christian lives around ourselves and our own inspiration. But there's this work to do.

There are formal roles in the church that need to be filled, but there are people all around us who need to grow up in Christ. Are you willing to help them do that? Is your eye open to seeing that that is something you need to do?

[24 : 29] I want to just shift tack now and think about just show you a model. This is meant to provoke you and you can react to this however you like, but this is one of the models for this kind of thing that's going around in the church and it's from the Saddleback Church.

Everyone know what the Saddleback Church is? I start talking like a Texan when I just say it. Saddleback. That's a very famous church down in California, Lake Forest, California, started by a guy named Rick Warren.

You will have heard of him, of the purpose-driven life. So it's the purpose-driven life. I want to say that I have a lot of time for Rick Warren. I'm not sure about the purpose-driven life. We read it as a Bible study.

But he's certainly come out very strongly against the kind of revival of the prosperity gospel. And he is someone who has not profited from his book.

He does reverse tithing. He tithes 90% and keeps 10%. So I think there's an authenticity and an integrity there. So I just want to say that. But they have a model. And I just want to show it to you here.

[25 : 35] It's called CLASS. And they have 101, 201, 301, and 401. Membership, maturity, ministry, missions. And they understand the whole thing being like a baseball diamond.

Can you see my baseball diamond there? And the idea is you work your way through the bases of the baseball diamond. So I guess you start with membership, maturity, ministry, missions, and magnification that's at the center.

That's worship. I find it kind of compelling. I love diagrams, one thing. And the kind of university instructor in me loves courses that you follow.

Let me read you a bit about what he says. He says, God wants you to take the next step spiritually. That could mean getting baptized, committing to take time to dig into the Bible on a daily basis, or maybe God wants you to see what his word has to say about why you exist.

Saddleback's CLASS system, he doesn't mean that in the British sense, CLASS system is all about that. He says, imagine a baseball diamond. At first base, our membership class, then you get the foundation of our class series, then head to second base where you'll find the tools to develop a closer relationship with God.

[26 : 48] Then third base, you'll begin to see how God specifically shaped you for ministry, spiritual gifts, heart abilities, personality experience. As you head for a home plate, CLASS 401 will help you to discover your life's mission of sharing God with the world.

That's kind of what they're doing. I want to describe to you two of the classes just to get you thinking. CLASS 201 is discovering spiritual growth. They write this, Do you want to become more like Jesus?

CLASS 201 will help you develop the habits you need to jump start your spiritual growth. It will give you an overview of the three basic spiritual habits every Christian needs in order to grow.

Daily time with God, giving, and fellowship. Come join us for this exciting class offered monthly. To register, go to class central on the patio before or after any of the weekend services.

Isn't that great? I love it. I like the idea of going to the patio. And then class 301 is called Discover Your Gifts. When you became a Christian, this is their blurb, right?

[27 : 51] God gave you salvation and the hope of eternity in heaven. He also gave you purpose and significance in your life now. He has given each of us the opportunity to serve others and make a real difference in someone's life.

When you serve others in Jesus' name, that's called ministry. God didn't design ministry for just a few of seminary degrees. At Saddleback, we believe that every member of our church is a minister.

That's what class 301 is all about. During this class, you will learn how God can use your spiritual gifts, your heart, passions, your abilities, personality, and experiences to minister to others in need.

This is discovering your shape for ministry. Shape stands for something else, but I can't remember what it is. First, God gave you a special ability when you started following him. We call this a spiritual gift.

God gave this gift to build up your church family and reach out to the world. God also gave you unique passions and heart for particular activities, subjects, and circumstances. God uses the things we feel deeply about to show us where we can serve.

[28 : 57] Third, in class 301, you will be given time to assess your abilities which have been given to you even before you became a Christian and see how these will help you in your ministry.

God also gives us a personality to share our shape through. Everyone's personality is not the same, which makes the expression of our shape that much more special. Finally, you'll be able to reflect on the multitude of experiences in your life which have been used by God to mold you for ministry.

The experiences of life help us know how to heal hurts of people in our church and in our community. ministry. All of this combined will let you discover your shape for ministry. That's one model that's going out there.

It's a baseball diamond. We go through the baseball diamond and we discover these things. I have a feeling that class 301, it sounds like a lot of fun. I really want to take it actually. It sounds like there's quite a lot of inventories being taken.

There's nothing more enjoyable than doing personality profiles is there. Do you ever do that online? If you go online, you can take endless personality profiles. I'm shocked at the variation in my intelligence quotient.

[30 : 01] From one test to the other. Especially the one that told me I didn't have much hope of going to university. I always fall down on the math side.

Anyways, that's a model. I wanted to put that out there as a kind of stark model. As I say, I think that Pastor Rick has quite a lot of integrity. I really think, you know, I appreciate in a way the presence that he is on the Christian scene because he is such a man of integrity.

in a public world of scoundrels in a way. And this is a very popular kind of way of doing things. You find a lot of churches adopting 101 membership, the whole language of 101, 201, 301, membership classes, introduction to the Christian faith.

It's a very current and popular model going around in the Christian world. And I think there are some strengths in that kind of thing. I mean, the whole idea of classes is very helpful.

After all, this is the only reference to monasticism in this whole talk. The first education in the Western world was that of monks in the cloister being taught. And so teaching does have a very important place in our church life, teaching, formal teaching of the Christian faith.

[31 : 16] I'm never kind of convinced, I'm willing to be proved wrong about this by someone here who wishes to, this whole thing about gifts and endowments of gifts. It just seems to me very deterministic.

But maybe it is helpful, I don't know. I have in my own ministry in the evening service found it helpful to slow it down, get to know people and find out what they're, just what they're like.

I mean, we have found just in terms of greeting, like welcoming and greeting, we had some very introverted people on the greeting team at the front door. So you can imagine what the kind of agony is for them to have to do that.

And we had some real extrovert people counting the money. I mean, and we had it all kind of turned around. So we've been freeing people up, you know. We've been sort of re-dividing how we understand these ministries to operate.

So the extroverts are on the door and the introverts can close the windows and they're all happier. I'm not quite sure if it's as simple as one, two, three, as the bases on a baseball diamond.

[32 : 15] We are not in the business of putting people through a process and having them come out completely formed. I think that's what seminary is for. You're supposed to laugh at that. That's what seminary feels like, anyways.

No, I want to suggest, I just put that out there. I think it's got some helpful things. But I also want to suggest that another way, the way for all of us as a community to grow and to teach and help others is in our relationships with one another.

And particularly in our small fellowships, like learners and exchange, our little community that we are, but also in your home group fellowship. Is your home group fellowship designed in any way to serve God's world beyond your fellowship?

Are you open to allowing someone who is a new Christian into your fellowship? Not so that they should dominate you, but that they should be disciplined and grow and experience more Christian maturity.

After all, in my life, it was hearing established Christians praying that showed me that you could pray intimately to Jesus. We need to hear those things.

[33 : 28] If I'm grown up as a Christian, you may not know how to do that. And hearing more mature Christians talk about the Bible, when you're new, it's like this impossible book to penetrate.

I remember in one small group fellowship I was in in rural Wales, there's this one fellow who was about my age, and I noticed that he always kept his finger sort of like this in his Bible.

And it was because he was terrified, I might say, can you turn to, you know, Ruth chapter 3? So he was always quickly looking to see where Ruth was and what page it was. And I thought that was delightful. It was kind of just sort of being sensitive to him and realizing that I should be sensitive to how I asked him to find a passage and to kind of protect his sort of public face there.

But he was growing through that. And actually, I remember in that fellowship, he prayed out loud for the first time ever in front of other people. And he prayed for me. And that was very moving.

Typically, many people at St. John's come into the church and into Christian faith through our Discovering Christ program. That's kind of the way we funnel people. And every year, people become Christians in that environment.

[34 : 42] It's very striking and wonderful how that happens. In fact, last year, Discovering Christ was going on at the same time as our annual general meeting. It was on a Wednesday night and someone said, do you know, four people became Christians on Wednesday night.

And I was so puzzled. I thought, well, it was a good general meeting. But four people became Christians in that? But it turns out it was over here at Discovering Christ. But in the past, we have struggled to find places for new Christians.

Christians. What do we do when someone becomes a new Christian and comes into the faith? Where do we put them? Do we have another program for them? See, program mentality comes in.

Oh, let's do a program. And there is a sense of a revolving door here. We tried placing people in beginners groups. That is, a group of new Christians with perhaps two experienced Christian leaders.

Now, that is an approach that has had its merits, but it has also presented a problem. Because when do you stop being a new Christian? In fact, one of the things we found was that beginner Christians placed in a beginner group tended to stay that way and become labeled as beginners.

[35 : 49] Difficult for them to get out of that and enter into the fullness of being a Christian, being part of the community. I want to suggest something of a two-pronged approach.

I think along with things like Central Focus and other Bible studies, we do need to clearly and regularly offer more formal teaching on the Christian faith. And here I'm going to cause Bill to be upset with me, but I think Learners Exchange should branch out and offer more teaching on another night of the week or at another time.

We have a wonderful, rich variety of teaching here on Sundays, which I think is just so wonderful. But we still need to have some other time, I think, I suggest, where we are teaching the faith, teaching the Christian faith, teaching the apostolic faith, not just for the newcomer, but for those who want to learn more about the faith in a more formal way.

But we also have small groups, a number of small groups. And think back to the organization of the church in Ephesians, of a multiplicity of ministries, geared around to the winning and care of new Christians.

And I wonder, are you in a small group? And is your small group open to caring for a new Christian? Small groups can become very comforting places, places of great intimacy and care, and that's important.

[37 : 13] But is your group open to caring for someone new? Are you interested in the context of your small group in caring for and helping someone deepen in the faith?

Because in the end, I believe it comes down to relationship over program. We can write a program for anything, and we can rely upon programs to do our work for us.

But, you know, it's not as easy as running through the bases of a baseball diamond. Programs are rigid things. They're not flexible. They're not attuned to the ups and downs and the rhythm of human life.

relationships are. And it's in the relationships between us that so much modeling happens, so much sharing, so much deepening, if we will be ready for it.

In the end, I believe that growing as a Christian and serving one another is about life and relationships, the whole of life. It is all of life.

[38 : 18] It is what we're called to do together. So as I close, I leave you with a couple of questions, and then I hope that we will have a wonderful discussion. I mean, what gifts can you share to help build up the body in Christ?

They may not be the ones that you immediately think you have. I'm not sure that it's as deterministic as the saddleback model says. After all, can't we grow in new areas? Can't we try new things?

Second, are you walking alongside anyone to help him or her in his Christian faith? Or, you know, are your eyes open to that? As I said, if you are a Christian, God has given you his spirit, and you know about Jesus, you don't have to get a degree.

It might be helpful, but you don't have to. And then finally, is your small group fellowship a good place to help nurture and grow new Christians? Why don't we just spend a moment thinking and then have a discussion?

second, go ahead and stop chapter 2, and■ y again, finally,■■■ Thank you.

[40 : 13] Thank you. Thank you.