

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

(Acts 2:42-47)

Making the Case for Small Groups

LESSON 1: Relationships

Now that we have made the case for community, we will seek to make the case for small groups as the best way to accomplish the community mandate. First, we must avoid what Russ Robinson calls *bodies in a circle; souls turned away* by pursuing growth through authentic relationships. This is hard work but well worth it – *2 Peter 1:5-7, 10-11*

STEP 1: Self-Disclosure

Real community requires intimacy, made possible through self-disclosure and concern for the disclosures of others. Why do we expect deep, intimate, lasting marriages but settle for mere camaraderie in our church? The church can not “know and be known” apart from an active small group structure.

STEP 2: Care-Giving

Real love puts others first – *John 15:13, 1 John 3:17* – and requires active listening and remembering – *James 1:19* – because remembering reminds others of the strength, nurture, and healing available in Christ. The church can not “love and be loved” apart from an active small group structure.

STEP 3: Humility

Jesus modeled humility from washing feet all the way to the cross – *John 13:1* – and we are to put on that same selfless humility like a garment – *Colossians 3:12* – and we should serve P.O.W.S (poor, orphans, widows, strangers) even those who can't or won't thank us – *James 1:27* – The church can't “serve and be served” apart from an active small group structure.

STEP 4: Truth-Telling

We are commanded to warn and correct each other but

admonition must lead to encouragement & edification – *Colossians 1:28-29, 3:15-16, 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13*
We can't experience real friendships without real honesty – *Ephesians 4:25* – The church can't “admonish and be admonished” apart from an active small group structure.

STEP 5: Affirmation

We are expected to celebrate spiritual growth, personal accomplishment, and life change – *Hebrews 10:24-25* – Heaven is full of celebration! – *Luke 15:10, Revelation 19:9* – and Jesus was THE master of celebration – *Luke 10:21-24*

Jesus was angered by the joyless Pharisees. Even when He knew His death was near, He spoke of joy – *John 15:10, 16:20-24* – and Paul often exhorted us to rejoice – *Romans 12:15, Philippians 1:26, 4:4* – The church can't “celebrate and be celebrated” apart from an active small group structure.

Real relationships are risky but worth it!

DISCUSSION:

Do you find it easy to share your problems in a setting like this? Why or why not?

How could you see a small group providing care for its members? For P.O.W.S?

Is there someone you should admonish but are afraid?

When was the last time you received an unsolicited affirmation? Gave one?