

WHERE NO ONE STANDS ALONE

I. THE IMPERSONAL NATURE OF OUR WORLD TODAY

A. OUR WORLD IS SO IMPERSONAL.

1. Everyone is so busy.
2. People in America used to know their neighbors, sit outside on their porches and visit.
3. Now we put fences around our houses and plant hedges to protect our privacy.
4. Grandparents used to help raise their grandchildren but that's almost unheard of these days.
5. We are so mobile that one in five Americans move each year.
6. Both societies and families are out of sync.
 - a. Communication is more difficult, even though it's easier.
 - b. We e-mail instead of telephoning.
 - c. We e-mail instead of walking around the corner at work to talk.
7. This marks a profound loss of intimacy and it has affected the church.
8. We as churches rarely experience the deep intimacy that God offers:
 - a. We rarely share what genuinely matters,
 - b. We rarely deal with the real lives and deep hurts or doubts of honest people,
9. We might know some facts about each other, but we do not actually know each other.
10. I am not talking here about the world but about the church.

11. Even among us we feel a sense of alienation and loneliness.
12. We must come to grips with our own sense of alienation.
13. We must come to grips with how to minister to outsiders the way Jesus did.

- a. I have always been impacted by Jesus' encounters with different people.

Like Zacchaeus (Luke 19:5-6),
the woman caught in adultery (John 10:10-11),
the woman at the well,
or Jesus' own disciples.

- b. Jesus dealt with people's innermost hurts and doubts.

- c. Jesus dealt with these issues one on one.

14. This helps us understand why Paul once wrote,

²² I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. ²³ I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings. (1 Cor 9:22-23)

15. We have the responsibility of ministering to people where they are!

16. And some things can only be ministered to in small groups.

17. How can we most effectively obey James 5:16, if it's not in group ministry?

¹⁶ Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16) NIV

B. THE INDEPENDENCE FACTOR

1. But the American way of life

and the rejection of God's ways
go against coming together to share each other's
burdens, fears, and hopes.

2. It is the church

that has to go against culture
and instill in believers
a closeness that pushes self aside.

3. Jesus tells us that we can possess a special type of intimacy.

4. Jesus says in John 17:20-21,

²⁰ *I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,*
²¹ *that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am*
in you. (John 17:20-21) NIV

5. That is,

- a. not pursuing different interests,
- b. or counteracting each other's purposes,
- c. but seeking God's way in the world.

18. Many people are desperate to experience "real" life
but don't know how to go about it.

19. This is when the church steps in.

20. This is when we step in
and show them how to gain close, personal relationships.

21. Just look at the two most successful TV programs of the 1990's:
Friends and Seinfeld.

22. Why were they so successful?
23. Simply because they tell the story of small group of friends who share their lives together.
24. People yearn to experience this for themselves.
25. If they can't, they do it vicariously—through television programs.
26. The fact is,
if people don't get a deep, spiritual connection,
they will seek it in many ways: alcohol, drugs, sex, you name it!

II. THE CHURCH'S CHALLENGE

A. Right now we have a choice to make.

1. People are drawn to two things.
 - a. Entertainment or
 - b. close, personal relationships
2. Why do I say this? Because we live in the age of stimulation where people are treated as consumers.
3. Consumers are perpetually unsatisfied, restless, anxious, and bored.
4. People all around us feel the discontents of
loneliness,
sickness,
weariness,
lack of sexual satisfaction,
the malaise of boring and meaningless jobs,
and feelings of futility and fatigue.
5. We must keep the church alive with theological content and depth of relationships,
 - a. Because if we don't, the alternative is entertainment.

6. If we treat people as consumers—religious consumers—
we train them to not appreciate the way God
really does fill our emptiness.
7. He fills us with Himself.
And we nurture each other to accept it.

B. That's why I choose a NT biblical model.

III. A NEW TESTAMENT BIBLICAL MODEL

A. The New Testament gives us a biblical basis for Life Groups.

⁴² *They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.* (Acts 2:42) NASU

- a. They sat at the apostles' feet when they taught
 - b. They went to each other's homes to eat
 - c. They prayed together in each other's homes
- B. ⁴⁴ *All the believers were together and had everything in common.* (Acts 2:44) NIV
- a. They were united;
 - b. they were joined in the same thing.
 - c. It does not mean that they all met together every time to worship in the same place,
 - d. or that they lived in the same house,
 - e. but that they were united in the same community.
 - f. We know this because of verse 46,

⁴⁶ *The believers met together in the Temple every day. They all had the same purpose. They broke bread in their homes, happy to share their food with happy hearts. They praised God, and all the people liked them. More and more people were being saved every day; they Lord was*

adding those people to the group of believers (Acts 2:46-47)
International Children's Bible

⁴⁶ *They worshiped together regularly at the Temple each day, met in small groups in homes for Communion, and shared their meals with great joy and thankfulness,* ⁴⁷ *praising God. The whole city was favorable to them, and each day God added to them all who were being saved. (Acts 2:46-47) The Living Bible*

- a. They met for worship at the Temple
 - b. They met in small groups in homes for fellowship
 - c. They shared meals together
 - d. They praised God!
 - e. And look what God did! God caused them to grow!
 - f. God can do the same for us!
- C. Acts 5:42 tells us they continued this same practice,

⁴² *And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ. (Acts 5:42) NAS*

1. Let's choose a biblical pattern;
 - a. Worship here all together.
 - b. Meet house to house to teach and preach Jesus as the Christ.
- D. Paul's ministry was marked by this same pattern.

1. In Acts 20:20 Paul reminded the Ephesian elders that he had exhorted them both,

²⁰ *... publicly and from house to house.*

IV. WHY ARE LIFE GROUPS ADVANTAGEOUS?

- A. They provide a structure for obeying 31 “one another” passages in the Bible (see Handout).
- B. These don’t happen by chance. They must be purposeful.

V. WHY JOIN A LIFE GROUP?

A. You get strength for life’s storms.

1. Ecclesiastes 4:9-10 offers a practical reason for participating in a Life Group:

Two are better than one – if one falls down, his friend can help him up. (Eccl 4:9-10)

2. Each individual can help the other carry a load too heavy to bear alone.

Carry each other’s burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ (Galatians 6:2).

3. True community offers strength for life’s storms.

B. You experience accountability, which is vital to spiritual growth.

1. You need friends to hold you accountable and offer acceptance while you change.
2. Friendships can provide unique opportunities for spiritual growth,
3. especially when you covenant to be mutually vulnerable and tell the truth.

As iron sharpens iron, a friend sharpens a friend (Proverbs 27:17).

4. Life Groups offer a connection – between Jesus, others, and ourselves – that purifies us.

C. You receive wisdom for making important decisions.

1. Life Groups also provide wisdom when we face important decisions.
2. As Proverbs 15:22 explains,

Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.
(Prov 15:22)

3. The more advisors you have, God says, the more likely you are to make right choices.

D. You find acceptance that helps repair your wounds.

1. You need Life Groups to achieve lasting transformation.
2. But during this change you also need acceptance and care.

My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no man than this, that he lay down his life for his friends (John 15:12-13).

CONCLUSION

- A. The church is the only place where most people,
 1. whether introvert or extrovert,
 2. have a reasonable promise of finding healthy, functional, accepting relationships.

The church is “A Place Where No One Stands Alone.”

Invitation

ILLUSTRATION: Vision from Bill Hybels' Book, Courageous Leadership

There was once a community of believers who were so totally devoted to God and to one another that their life was charged with the Spirit's power. Early writers said about the church, "Oh, how they love God and love one another. In that band of Christ followers, believers loved one another with a radical kind of love. They took off their masks and did life together, the way God intends it! They laughed and cried together. They worked and rested together! They sang and served together in authentic Christian fellowship! Those who had more incredibly shared with those who had less until socio-economic barriers melted away. People related together in ways that bridged gender and racial chasms, and celebrated cultural differences. They were an Acts 2 kind of community and the world has never been the same since!

Now my question is, why can't that community exist in the 21st century? We have to choose. Are you going to exclude people and shut them out of your life and heart or are you going to choose to embrace friendships with an open heart through a small group. I hope you embrace and choose community.