



# **LIFE GROUPS**

*Living in the Kingdom from House to House*

For the Priesthood

by

**Cornerstone Church Johannesburg**

**LIFE GROUPS: Living in the Kingdom from House to House**

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## **LIFE GROUPS**

### ***Living in the Kingdom from House to House***

### ***For the Priesthood***

Why Life Groups? Why meet in homes? These are the overarching questions that this manual attempts to answer. The manual has been built off of a course conducted at Cornerstone Church Johannesburg in August and September, 2012.

The course is available in two parts – one part designed for those either currently involved in leadership in the Church or looking to be (*Life Groups for Leaders*) and the other for those who are not in leadership (*Life Groups for the Priesthood*). Both are available at [www.cornerstonechurch.co.za](http://www.cornerstonechurch.co.za)

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## **Part 1**

### **Living in the Kingdom from House to House**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/living-in-the-kingdom-from-house-to-house/>

#### **Why We Meet the Way We Do**

It's always been God's desire that we co-labour with Him. We see this when we look at Jesus' ministry. For three and a half years as he goes around from village to village, city to city, he calls a group of twelve to Himself, trains them and sends them out to continue His work.

But how should they continue His work? After he has faced the cross and overcomes and is resurrected, He tells them to wait. Simply to wait. He promises that they are going to receive something that will let them be His witnesses even to the ends of the earth (Matt 28: 19, 20).

The first two chapters of Acts show us how Jesus built the Church and how he builds it today. It's important to remember that it has practical applications – it's not just giving us a history of what happened.

The Church is built on the revelation of Jesus Himself (Matthew 16: 13 – 18). That's where we first start seeing something about the 'Church' in the Scriptures. After that, God pours out His Spirit, which we see in Acts. The result of that outpouring is powerful preaching that cuts people to the heart and causes at first a desperate cry for salvation and then a response of an awe of God. That all leads to a devoted lifestyle, in particular devotion to the Word, prayer, the breaking of bread and fellowship (Acts 2:42). And if you look carefully you'll notice that they met in homes a great deal. So did Jesus in His ministry.

We're not called to make converts but disciples, which requires more than just preaching or wonderful corporate meetings but rather an interconnected and devoted lifestyle where there is a great deal of hospitality involved. It's in homes where relationship actually happens.

It's far better to let the Scriptures impose on us than we haul out some new manual of our own. When we look at Acts, it's easy to see that meeting in homes was a core culture that Jesus built into the life of His church right from the beginning. Let's go into detail here and break this all down.

## The promise of the Holy Spirit

### Acts 1 (ESV):

1 In the first book, O Theophilus, I have dealt with all that Jesus began **to do and teach...**

Immediately we are confronted here with something that challenges our version of Christianity – Jesus both did and taught, which had an impact. His teaching was followed by doing and visa versa. He is the same today. We need both the demonstration of His power and the Gospel.

A dead Christianity is all about reams and reams of teaching. But teaching ought to produce Kingdom results with lives transformed, healings happening, cities being impacted and situations turned upside down – just like we see in the book of Acts. The Holy Spirit is poured out for the sake of the Gospel, for the sake of establishing the Kingdom. You always need both doing and teaching, you can't lean on just one or the other.

2 until the day when he was taken up, after he had given commands through the Holy Spirit to the apostles whom he had chosen. 3 He presented himself alive to them after his suffering by many proofs, appearing to them during forty days and speaking about the kingdom of God.

Note that Jesus didn't speak about the Church but about the Kingdom. We'll pick this up a little later.

4 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to **wait** for the promise of the Father,

We need to wait for God at times. So often we rush ahead and do our thing and implore God to join us in what we're doing. But rather we ought to be joining Him in what He is doing.

which, he said, “you heard from me; 5 for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

God's intention is that the whole Church is baptised in and with the Spirit. He never divided the church up into Baptists, Methodists or Wild Pentecostals, etc. We need to get out of the hyper-conservative or hyper-charismatic camps and focus on what we see in the Scriptures. The Spirit is for everyone.

## The ascension

6 So when they had come together, they asked him, “Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?” 7 He said to them, “It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. 8 But **you** will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon **you**, and **you** will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and

to the end of the earth.”

Here is the key issue of everything. Jesus' desire is to fill His Church with His Spirit. He puts us in community and impacts us in our togetherness so that we can be witnesses. There's a partnership with Him that takes place. We witness wherever we are. The Gospel must go out in power – His Spirit.

### Outpouring of the Spirit

#### Acts 2: 2 - 5

2 When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested[a] on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

5 Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven.

We start seeing the fulfillment of what Jesus said in Acts 1 – that the disciples would be His witnesses to all nations. God puts the early church straight away in an opportunity to do just that – *after* He has filled them with the Spirit, not before.

Right on our doorstep is the nations – in our city. Now when this happened see how the crowds responded:

6 And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were **bewildered**, because each one was hearing them speak in his own language. 7 And they were **amazed** and **astonished**, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? 8 And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? 9 Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, 10 Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, 11 both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God.”

When the Spirit comes on a church it impacts everyone. And what's the first thing we see coming out of the hearts of these Christians from the upper room? Praise. This praise left people amazed and perplexed.

12 And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?” 13 But others mocking said, “They are filled with new wine.”

You will always have these two responses – those who realise that something's happening here, and

they are amazed and perplexed; and, of course, the hacklers. Don't be surprised when some mock you and even accuse you of being drunk when you speak the Gospel!

### **Anointed preaching**

After Jesus pours out His Spirit we see Peter preach, quoting from the book of Joel around God's promise that He would pour out His Spirit. After His sermon (Acts 2: 14 – 36) see the response:

37 Now when they heard this they were *cut to the heart*, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?"

38 And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Peter doesn't make distinctions. He mentions all these things together – repent, be baptised, receive the Spirit. This is for all believers.

41 So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls.

Think about what this must have been like for this church. You go to bed with 120 people in your local church and you know you need to pray and wait. You wake up the next morning, go to a prayer meeting, and by the end of the day you are now 3120 people! If we want to reach our city and do what God has called us to do, it's not going to be through clever planning and strategising, decked-out buildings and the like. Rather, we need the anointed power of God which will result in men and women alive with the Gospel.

### **A Devoted Way of Life**

So, how does this pertain to meeting in homes? Well, see how this worked. After the initial three thousand, the Scriptures say that numbers were added to them daily. Then later on two thousand were added until twenty-five percent of the city were born again! Then they were dispersed and they went out preaching, with the Antioch church being planted. Here Paul and Barnabas were sent and Galatia opened to them and eventually there are churches all around Asia Minor. Then they go to Europe (Ephesus) and it was all impacted.

It started with 120 waiting on God. Do you think God's ideal is to get a small bunch of people together and make sure they're secure and happy? No, he has a great purpose in mind. He looks at 120 people and he can see Asia Minor impacted; Europe impacted; the world. We're the seed He wants to use. From your small group of people that gather at a house God sees nations changed.



The question is, how best can we shepherd? We're not about converts but disciples, so how do we disciple? God has a way that He builds the Church that we need to grab hold of. But we can't do that unless we are convicted about it. And Acts 2:42 addresses that:

42 And they *devoted* themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.

Devotion has to be the way we're characterised as believers. In this scripture we see that devotion was the norm. We only have one shot at this thing called life: why not rather be devoted to God and His mission than be all over the place and all about our mission? What will count in the end? Our agenda or God's agenda?

So how did they live out God's agenda? Through devotion – devotion to the Word of God (the apostles' teaching; devotion to prayer; devotion to the breaking of bread and devotion to fellowship).

43 And awe came upon every soul...

See this – awe came on the whole church without a permanent building, a sound system, lighting or smoke machines etc. I have a pastor in Durban to thank for that insight. We can't rely on these kinds of set-ups to get people in. They ought to come in for the Gospel – not because we have a great anything but because we have a great God.

43b ...and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

And with this the miracles flowed. Not everyone was healed, but people were getting healed, delivered, saved. God is wanting to restore that to us.

44 And all who believed were together and had all things in common. 45 And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. 46 And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

These were a hospitable people. Homes were open. Because they built this way God added. This isn't what you find at most 'Church growth seminars'. At those generally the 'Three B's' are preached – Bucks; Bums in Seats; and Buildings. Whatever it takes to bring the money in and to get guys to stay is the core focus. But God's way is different.

You see throughout Scripture that when you build things His way then He fills it with His Spirit, His

Power, and then the people come. In the Old Testament the Ark had to get built His Way; the Temple had to be built according to His pattern. Then He came. Like in the book of Ezekiel, once it's built according to God's way then He fills it with His Spirit. And if He's there then it grows.

### **So how do we meet?**

Let's address the heart of why we're meeting first before getting into the practical applications.

#### **1. Acts 1:3 – Kingdom first**

From Acts 1:3 you can see that it's all about the Kingdom first. We're not about church growth but about the Kingdom impacting this world. We're not saying Life Groups are important because they've proven to be a great formula for making a big church. No, the Church serves God's Kingdom agenda. Jesus is establishing the Kingdom of God through the Church. Life Group is a key way in which we serve this agenda because it's where real discipling takes place. You can't disciple closely in large, corporate settings.

#### **2. 1:8 – Our Apostolic purpose**

We only ever do what we do with the infilling of the Spirit. We are called to be witnesses by His infilling. The Church is supposed to impact “Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and the ends of the Earth (Acts 1:8)”.

And who is Samaria to us? The demographic that doesn't look like you. (The Jews hated the Samaritans.) It's the cultures we're not used to and they're here in our borders and outside our borders as we go to the ends of the earth.

#### **3. 2:37-41 – The heart of the matter**

We must be convicted in our hearts. We need to be crying out to God, “What must I do?” just like the crowds did in Acts. And the answer to their question? Be filled with the Spirit and be baptised (Acts 2:38). Identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We live on way too much human sweat and not enough on His power.

#### **4. 2:42 – The importance of personal devotion**

We can preach as much as we like but how is your personal devotion? This is the way in which we “work out our salvation” (Philippians 2: 12, 13) – we are devoted to the Word; to prayer; to the fellowship; and to the breaking of bread (Acts 2:42). We need to make a personal decision to change our patterns and live devoted. It must come from the inside out or else it will never produce the

Kingdom.

If you don't have a personal devotion to Christ and His ways then you won't really understand why meeting in homes is so important, why discipling is so paramount. Too much of our Christianity these days is about getting the congregation together and teaching them some Christian 'tricks' – formulas for this and that. When you meet in homes the point is to disciple, not to teach some new gimmick.

We need to come back to the drawing board – find the best time of your day and give God that time. When was the last time you got excited about planning some time off to wait on God? Devotion starts with us as individuals and that life will then boil over to us in our togetherness. We are dead without our personal devotion to God.

## **5. 2:43-47 – Why we meet the way we do?**

We get the value of meeting in homes from the Scriptures. Jesus is building His Church. What He did back then by the Holy Spirit He will do and wants to do today.

Jesus looked over the 120 in that upper room and saw how they would impact a city, a region and beyond. He's committed to doing the same thing today as he looks over your Life Group.

He is ushering us towards Acts 1:8 – a Christianity that is both done and spoken. We are devoted to the Word of God (the Apostles' teaching in Acts 2:42) and we see in the Word that the early church met both in large corporate meetings – they met in the temple – and in homes (Acts 2: 46), so that's why we do it the same way.

The congregational dynamic has wonderful benefits but as they in Acts worked out their Christianity in a discipleship way it was fleshed out in a smaller context. It's impossible to disciple effectively in a large, congregational setting. If all the leaders of our church were taken out and the building was closed down, our church should still continue, because the church is wherever we get together – it's not a building.

Fellowship is a very misunderstood word and the English language doesn't convey the richness of what the word means in the Scriptures. Here we see that relationships move into friendships into covenant and then into partnership. We see how Jesus partnered with his disciples when He sent them out.

God is wanting to put partnerships together. Dynamics that happen in little groups, something of the Kingdom that transacts there, just doesn't happen in a larger setting. And so meeting in homes continue to be a big part of how Jesus builds his church.

***Questions to ask***

1. What is the relationship between the God's Kingdom and the church? (Acts 1:3)
2. What is our purpose as believers? (Acts 1:8)
3. What is the heart of the matter? (Acts 2:37-41)
4. What's all the fuss about personal devotion? (Acts 2:42)
5. Why do we meet the way we do? (Acts 2:43-47)

## Part 2

### Homes, house-to-house and households

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/homes-house-to-house-and-households/>

In Part 1 of this series on Life Groups, we looked at Acts 1 & 2 and examined how the early church started and how they met. Acts 2:42 and vs 43 shows us that they devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching (the Word), the breaking of bread, the fellowship and prayers. Verse 43 shows us that they met both in large corporate meetings (at the Jewish Temple) and in their homes. It even says they did this day by day!

Now we'll look at the emphasis the Scriptures place on homes, starting from the ministry of Jesus to the life of the early church, including the letters, which give us more clues to God's heart for church life.

#### In Jesus' day, a lot of ministry took place in homes

In Acts 1:8 Jesus tells his disciples that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon them, and they will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea, Samaria and to the ends of the earth. He lived this out in his own ministry. The Gospel always goes out in ever-increasing circles. You see this from the scriptures.

Let's examine how much of Jesus' ministry occurred in homes and came out of homes. Unlike what we might expect today, or what they might have expected then, Jesus didn't occupy some chief place in society. He didn't minister out of some school of philosophy or anything like that. No, instead he ministered and taught in normal, ordinary, every-day homes.

The Gospel must invade our homes and then must flow out of our homes. Our homes ought to be a place where the healing of God flows.

#### Matthew 8: 14 – 17

14 And when Jesus entered **Peter's house**, he saw his mother-in-law lying sick with a fever.  
15 He touched her hand, and the fever left her, and she rose and began to serve him. 16 That evening they brought to him many who were oppressed by demons, and he cast out the spirits with a word and healed all who were sick. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah: "He took our illnesses and bore our diseases."

**Luke 5: 31 – 32** (also see Matthew 9: 10 – 13)

“31 And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. 32 I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.”

This profound declaration of the Gospel comes out of a home (Levi's home). Right here, in a home, all sorts of things are happening – Jesus is talking about the Gospel; He is being criticised; He rebukes the Pharisees. These very important moments didn't occur at some important place somewhere.

Jesus' declaration of the sick needing salvation is what our homes should stand for – a place where the lost are welcome, where people can get saved. We can invite any of our friends to our home as, after all, the Gospel is not for the righteous but the unrighteous. Effectively, our homes are a venue for the Gospel.

### Mark 2:1

And when [Jesus] returned to Capernaum after some days, it was reported that he was **at home**.

The rest of this passage tells the story of the paralytic who was healed after being lowered down from the roof by his friends because there wasn't even space by the door. That all happened in Jesus' own home, who was preaching the word. Note that he didn't complain that they had opened up his roof to lower down their friend!

### Mark 3:20 – 21

**Then he went home**, and the crowd gathered again, so that they could not even eat. 21 And when his family heard it, they went out to seize him, for they were saying, “He is out of his mind.”

Talk about how the Gospel invades! They couldn't even eat because the crowd! His family even said He was out of his mind.

Jesus' ministry was from the inside out. If the Gospel isn't working at home, will it work outside the home? Jesus took the Gospel home – he allowed it to mess up his own home, to turn it upside down.

- A lot of Jesus' discipling happened in homes. **Mark 9: 33-37** offers us an example (this is possibly Jesus' own home being referred to):

33 And they came to Capernaum. And **when he was in the house** he asked them, “What were you discussing on the way?” 34 But they kept silent, for on the way they had argued with one

another about who was the greatest. 35 And he sat down and called the twelve. And he said to them, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all." 36 And he took a child and put him in the midst of them, and taking him in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me."

- **Luke 10:38-42** – He taught in Mary and Martha's house.

- **Luke 19:1-10**

1 He entered Jericho and was passing through. 2 And there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. 3 And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small of stature. 4 So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. 5 And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for **I must stay at your house today.**" 6 So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. 7 And when they saw it, they all grumbled, "He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner." 8 And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, "Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold." 9 And Jesus said to him, "**Today salvation has come to this house**, since he also is a son of Abraham. 10 For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Salvation came to a house, and that mattered to Jesus, and he declared this salvation out of a house. That declaration can be made in our homes too. Our home is a rescue station where people can get healed. Yes, it is a sanctuary as well for us and there are times when it's good to just unwind. But the fact is that it must be an outlet for the Gospel.

- **Matt 26:18**

He said, "Go into the city to a certain man and say to him, 'The Teacher says, My time is at hand. I will keep the Passover **at your house** with my disciples. '"

The Passover was a profound moment in time that we still celebrate today. And it all happened in a home.

- **Luke 7:36**

One of the Pharisees asked him to eat with him, and he went into the Pharisee's **house** and reclined at the table. 37 And behold, a woman of the city, who was a sinner, when she learned that he was reclining at table in the Pharisee's house, brought an alabaster flask of ointment,

38 and standing behind him at his feet, weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears and wiped them with the hair of her head and kissed his feet and anointed them with the ointment.

Our homes ought to be filled with an aroma of worship. This is a beautiful picture of what a home can be.

### **The first church met in the temple and in homes**

- **Acts 2:1-3 1**

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. 2 And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled **the entire house** where they were sitting. 3 And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested on each one of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Lord determined that the Church would be born with the power of the Spirit in a home. This meeting in homes continued as a component of the early church's life, as the scriptures below show. You didn't have to tell them to meet in homes, they knew that that's where Christianity is lived out.

- **Acts 2:46-47 46**

And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread **in their homes**, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, 47 praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

- **Acts 5:42**

And every day, in the temple and from **house to house**, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.

- **Acts 8:1b-3**

And there arose on that day a great persecution against the church in Jerusalem, and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 2 Devout men buried Stephen and made great lamentation over him. 3 But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering **house after house**, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.

- **Acts 12:12-17**



When Peter was set free by the angels, he went to Mary's house, the mother of John-Mark, where there was a prayer meeting being held for his release from prison! Our homes can be used for prayer.

- **Acts 20:17-21**

17 Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him.  
18 And when they came to him, he said to them:

“You yourselves know how I lived among you the whole time from the first day that I set foot in Asia, 19 serving the Lord with all humility and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews; 20 how I did not shrink from declaring to you anything that was profitable, and **teaching you in public and from house to house**, 21 testifying both to Jews and to Greeks of repentance toward God and of faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As you can see, Paul' ministry – despite being a prominent leader – included preaching from house to house. Discipling happens in homes. If you read through the book of Acts with this in mind you'll start to pick up the heart of it.

### **Households were impacted with the Gospel**

(Some went on to become churches)

- **Acts 10:17-48**

Cornelius' household in Caesarea

- **Acts 16:11-15**

Lydia's household in Philippi

- **Acts 16:25-34**

The Philippian jailer

This last scripture is a good one to read. God is very interested in saving households, not just individuals. After you're saved the next thing on God's agenda is to see your household saved. This is how we should be praying. And not just for our parents or our kids but for our aunts and uncles and all the rest.

- **Acts 18:1-11**

After Paul is kicked out of the synagogue in Corinth, he moves to Titius Justus' house next door and ministers from his house. There the ruler of the synagogue, Crispus, and his household are saved! So he was kicked out of the synagogue only to have the ruler of the synagogue saved in a house next door.

These scriptures challenge the way some of us think of Life Groups. This isn't a time to play Scrabble or Chess! God is interested in this.

### Churches in homes

At the end of many of Paul's letters, you'll see he greets churches that meet in homes. For example:

- **Rom 16:5; 1 Cor 16:19**

Priscilla and Aquila's home

- **Col 4:15**

Nympha of Laodicea's home

- **Philemon 2**

Philemon from Lycos Valley's home

It seems churches may have been planted in houses and moved elsewhere as they got bigger. Some of them had big mansions so they could accommodate that. The point is that there's a strong theme surrounding the involvement of homes with the Gospel.

### The Principles

Taking all the above into account, let's apply this to today. So, why do we meet the way we do (in homes and in big corporate gatherings)?

#### 1. We emulate Jesus

- We see how Jesus ministered above. But Jesus also calls his house a “house of prayer for all nations” (Mark 11:17).

Life Groups aren't a program that we add on to our Christianity but are rather the way in which we live it out. We don't need amazing facilities – although we do thank God for our facility. Our primary way of meeting is in homes.

- Jesus also spoke about how Zeal for His Father's house consumed Him (John 2:17). A home is not just a place but it's a family. When we meet in a home that family is making a statement about who they serve, who their God is, the Gospel they believe and the Jesus they trust.
- Jesus also practises hospitality. See **John 14: 1 – 4:**

“Let not your hearts be troubled. Believe in God; believe also in me. 2 In my Father's

house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also. 4 And you know the way to where I am going.”

Jesus is preparing a place for us in His home, not at a hotel or some or other place. That's hospitality. Hospitality says that everything you have belongs to the Kingdom of God. There is none that are unwelcome, no sinner that will be turned away. That's Kingdom.

## 2. Our home/family is our most practical tool to use for the Gospel

- When we talk of homes we don't just mean a place but also a family. God wants our treasures and talents. He wants an amazing river of Gospel life to flow out of our homes.
- Hospitality is love in action. You want to tell me you love me? Well, is your door open? Hospitality is not about having the best house, a full fridge and the best crockery. Hospitality is about the home being open.
- The New Testament often challenges us to practice hospitality:

### i. **Matt 10:12-14 12**

As you enter the house, greet it. 13 And if the house is worthy, let your peace come upon it, but if it is not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14 And if anyone will not receive you or listen to your words, shake off the dust from your feet when you leave that house or town.

- If that home is not hospitable, Jesus says let your peace return to you.

### ii. **Rom 12:9-13 9**

Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. 10 Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. 11 Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. 12 Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. 13 Contribute to the needs of the saints and **seek to show hospitality.**

### iii. **Heb 13:1-2 1**

Let brotherly love continue. 2 **Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers**, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

### iv. **1 Pet 4:8-10 8**

Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, since love covers a multitude of sins. 9 **Show hospitality to one another without grumbling.** 10 As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:

v. **3 Jn 5-12 (To Gaius)**

5 Beloved, it is a faithful thing you do in all your efforts for these brothers, strangers as they are, 6 who testified to your love before the church. You will do well to send them on their journey in a manner worthy of God. 7 For they have gone out for the sake of the name, accepting nothing from the Gentiles. 8 Therefore we ought to support people like these, that we may be fellow workers for the truth.

9 I have written something to the church, but Diotrephes, who likes to put himself first, does not acknowledge our authority. 10 So if I come, I will bring up what he is doing, talking wicked nonsense against us. And not content with that, he refuses to welcome the brothers, and also stops those who want to and puts them out of the church.

11 Beloved, do not imitate evil but imitate good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God. 12 Demetrius has received a good testimony from everyone, and from the truth itself. We also add our testimony, and you know that our testimony is true.

Here's a whole letter in the Bible that's all about hospitality. Gaius was commended for his hospitality. He was obviously well known for it. And now, for all of eternity, he has been commended for it!

But can you see how wicked Diotrephes' heart had become? For all of eternity he is known as the guy who wanted to be first, so he stopped his own people from showing hospitality to others (vs 10b) and even put them out of the church if they did.

**We live our lives from the inside out**

Having our own devotion times must grip out hearts. Our home should be a place where we practice the Gospel. It starts with our devotions and then boils over to leading our families and then practicing the Gospel in hospitality.

1 Tim 3:1-8 and Titus 1:7-8 list hospitality as part of the qualifications of being a leader. It's not just about leading the home / family, but opening the home up for the Gospel.

**Out of this culture of using our homes as a tool for the Gospel, we organise Life Groups in**

**homes and offices and wherever else necessary.**

The first church saw that it was necessary to meet in small groups. It's in the Scriptures as a model for us to follow. It's a Kingdom culture and therefore we want to practice it in our Christianity.

It ought to happen naturally (and many times it does) but we also formalise Life Group meetings for the sake of discipleship and shepherding. This isn't something we want to add on to our church life, it's something we want to make a part of our life and celebrate. The real nitty gritty of Christianity happens in homes (we love our wives from Monday to Sunday).

It's great to invite someone to a large corporate gathering but it's even better when we can invite them into our home and share the Gospel with them there. Are we known in our neighbourhoods as homes of healing? Or are we just known as the irritating Christians who play loud music?

We choose leaders from those who we see are getting it right at home, along with the other qualifications listed in 1 Timothy 3. It doesn't mean they're perfect. It means that they know how to sort things out with God. We will address leadership more strongly in the next part.

**We believe, unflinchingly, that this is the way we build the church Jesus is building**

This isn't something we've decided on beforehand and then have tried to find scriptures to support it. When we look at the New Testament we see this is how discipleship happens. It makes sense – it's much more sustainable that way. Everything God has called us to can happen in a home context and we want to make space for that to happen.

***Questions to ask***

1. What was so special about homes to Jesus?
2. Why was the book of Acts church focused on homes?
3. Is my home a fortress or a tool for the Gospel?
4. Do I understand the heart of hospitality?

## **Part 3**

### **Life Groups in Cornerstone**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded at <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/lifegroups-in-cornerstone/>

In Part 2 we looked at the emphasis the Scriptures place on meeting in homes, starting from the ministry of Jesus to the life of the early church, including the letters, which give us more clues to God's heart for church life.

Now we'll look more closely at why Life Groups are important for us today and how Life Groups are practically worked out in the life of a church, using Cornerstone Bedfordview as an example.

#### **A clash of cultures**

Constantly we're addressing the fact that the Kingdoms of this world are diametrically opposed to the Kingdom of God. As much as we've been called to turn the world upside down with the Gospel, many times the world has turned the church upside down. We're very tempted to take the ways that the world uses to capture people's attention and "run" churches that way.

Church life, which includes life groups, clashes against the prevailing culture of our time. As the Church we could just go with the whole current post-modern flow and give into the systems of this world, or we could challenge the culture with the Kingdom culture we find in the Scriptures.

What are some of the pushes from our culture?

#### **1. A consumer Christianity**

This is where it's really "all about me" and questions of how beneficial it is for me personally are made all-important. Basically, if it's not going to be easy then what is the reason to be involved? So if church demands too much then it loses its benefit and is a waste of time.

#### **2. A spectator Christianity**

This is when I basically come to church to watch a show. We live busy lives in the city and so there's a push to just get all the "church stuff" done on a Sunday morning so we can get on with our lives. But the Sunday morning time is the least important in our Christian lives. The most important time is our day-to-day living out of our faith; a commitment to a lifestyle of Biblical values.

The Sunday meetings enable us to be encouraged so we can fulfill what we're called to do together

while Life Groups help us flesh that out in a personal way. But not many sermons are about the in-between, most important bits of our life.

### **3. “I reserve my rights” Christianity**

Here I just choose what I like from a menu and dispose of those aspects that make me feel uncomfortable, don't fit in with what I'd like, or challenge me in ways I'd prefer not to be challenged in. Self-sacrifice and obedience to Christ go out the window.

But we've been called to live in a different culture altogether.

#### **The biblical value of Life Groups as seen in Scripture**

In the church we need to see disciples made, not converts. Life Groups is not a programme or something to fill another night – something to justify the elders' salaries – but it's rather about a lifestyle where we practice Christianity in a community.

We've already seen in Part 2 that it's the way the early church met and God calls us to have a heart of hospitality. This is part of working out our salvation with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12,13).

Who is responsible for our growth as a Christian? Ultimately, we are personally responsible. It's good that we prayerfully consider a church that will help grow us, but it's also up to us to work out our salvation and as we take responsibility we also share that responsibility together.

#### **The important purpose of Life Groups**

##### **1. Life Groups enable the elders of a church to care for the flock**

We don't set up shallow Life Groups. Rather, this is the place where there is a more hands-on approach to shepherding the flock.

When we have a visitor to our church we try to engage them personally rather than have a system that follows them up with general letters of welcome and so forth. This is because God deals with each of us personally and we feel that it's good for us to represent that heart of God as a church. That's why people need to be encouraged to join a Life Group as soon as possible so that they can be personally shepherded.

Life Groups revolve around three hallmarks of shepherding: loving, leading and feeding. This is where discipling takes place. We want to see each person changed from glory to glory and becoming like Christ. Life Group leaders enable the elders to care for the flock.

## **2. Life Groups provide a place where the flock can be envisioned.**

Alone we can lose vision but together we can get on board with something and so be envisioned. We may develop relationships around many interests or issues but the real objective is about being disciplined in Christ.

## **3. In Life Groups, people have space to grow relationally**

You can't really grow relationally on a Sunday morning meeting where things are often rushed or there are a lot of people around. You can't grow relationally in the supermarket either when you bump into someone buying the groceries. No, in a Life Group, in someone's home, is where we work out our relationships and where we truly learn to love, forgive, honour each other and so on. Here is where Christianity becomes personal.

## **4. Life Groups provide accountability**

Along with the above, Life Groups provide the space for relationships to also include accountability.

## **5. Life Groups provide opportunity for participation, making Christianity practical and a lifestyle**

In a Life Group everyone partakes in prayer, sharing their testimony, serving the others, worship (breaking of bread) and exercising the gifts God has given them in the Spirit (prophecy, etc.).

Not all of us can prophesy on a Sunday morning, but we can in a smaller setting at a Life Group.

Christianity is best lived out through participation. You must be connected to a church and then you must function.

## **6. Life Groups are about formation, not information**

This is not time for more information but a time to be challenged with the 'hows' of Christianity. i.e. formation.

Life Groups provide the space where we can, as in Acts 2, cry out, "Brothers, what shall we do?" More information won't help. We want disciples, not experts. We need encouragement and prayer, done together, to help us faithfully plod along in in God during tough times.

## **7. In Life Groups, we seek and save the lost**



We learn how to share our faith, how to be engaged in a lifestyle of evangelism, and we pray for the lost, our families, our city, the nations and so on.

Statistics say that, putting our relationships together and seeing it as one network, we affect about 40,000 people on a daily basis.

At Life Groups we provide opportunities for the lost where we can invite them. And we keep developing our apostolic identity – going on ministry trips together, serving together, and so on.

### **8. Life Groups equip for works of service**

Life Groups are to equip us for works of service. Whatever it is. Your gift makes room for you. There's nothing more healthy than a Christian whose giving out. It's when you stop giving out that problems begin.

#### **Practically – Looking at our meetings at Bedfordview**

Here's how we have worked out the value of Life Groups in Cornerstone Bedfordview, to serve as an example.

- Sunday Mornings (9am)

This is when we worship as a congregation, envision, teach / preach, hear from God, present the gospel and more.

This meeting is primarily about worship – it is, after all, the sole purpose of man to glorify God. Here we enjoy a corporate dynamic where we see the Spirit poured out and we see changes taking place.

We want there to be a friendliness, fellowship and sincerity. That's what we're showcasing – who we are as a community. But that's also all in our worship. See 1 Cor 14.

- Sunday evenings (6pm)

These meetings are more geared towards evangelism or providing more space for the spiritual gifts to operate. For evangelism we usually have courses or series' or cafe-styled evenings. We also tend to do our celebrations or ordinations on Sunday evenings. Basically, the Sunday evening meeting purpose changes quite a lot.

Wednesday evenings (6pm) – Wednesday Night Life

- We usually have a prayer meeting from 6 – 6:45pm.
- We then enjoy a meal together until 7:30pm
- We then have a Bible study until 8:30pm

## **Life Groups**

Generally, Life Groups meet in homes on Tuesday and Thursday evenings at various times. We're also addressing the necessity of meeting at other times and venues. Therefore, we have lunch time Life Groups that cater for business people who can't make evenings, and Friday late afternoon youth Life Groups.

Life Groups can form around a specific demographic, function, need or purpose – there isn't a specific model in terms of how we put them together.

### **So, who should be in a Life Group?**

Everyone. Every person who is serious about their Christianity.

### **How Life Groups are led**

Life Groups are led by deacons who are in relationship with and have oversight from an elder. We see in Phil 1:1 that Paul begins addressing the saints first before the deacons and elders (overseers). So we understand that the highest form of life in a local church are the 'saints', not the leaders.

God holds the team of elders and deacons accountable for the wellbeing of a local church. These people don't have perfect lives but what's important is that they know how to sort it out with God.

Why homes? Because it really is the best and most practical way that the leaders of the local church can 'watch over your souls' as called to by God (Heb 13:7).

### ***Questions to ask***

1. What is the difference between a program and a lifestyle?
2. What are the meetings of this local church, and why?
3. What is the heart behind Life Groups, and when do they meet?
4. Who are Life Groups intended for, and who leads them?

## **Part 4**

### **A Kingdom of Priests**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-priesthood-of-all-believers/>

In Part 3 we looked at how Life Groups function in the life of a church, using Cornerstone Bedfordview as an example. Now, this aspect of our Life Groups course focuses on the “Priesthood of all Believers” and their role in the church.

#### **Priesthood of all believers?**

The term “priesthood” can sound very religious and that often makes us lose the essence of what it means. And what it means is that God has got a calling and ministry for every believer in the church that lines up with what He has called the church to do – not just pastors/elders or deacons, but everyone. In the Bible, all Christians are called saints and 'priests'. It's the priests that cause the church to live in its fullness.

God is sovereign, so does He need us? Does he need this “priesthood of all believers”? Actually no, God is all sufficient and so needs nothing. But he chooses to use us as priests. He chooses to use believers who can partake and participate in the great work that He's doing on this earth. He longs for us to be involved in that which He is doing.

If we can grasp that we're not just a number in the Church but that God wants us to be involved in His purposes, we'll go on to complete God's calling for the Church. It doesn't matter who you are, God wants to use you and has a great purpose for your life.

The end-time revival that the Scriptures speak about will not be made up of a few big personalities but of every believer in the Church. It's often been said that God wants to raise a 'nameless and faceless' generation. God is committed to this. That doesn't mean he doesn't know your name or face, what it means is that he wants to use all believers as one group to fulfil his purpose. He wants all the glory at the end of the day, no person or group but God will get the glory.

So where does this term 'priesthood of all believers' originate from and what does it mean, exactly? Let's delve into more detail.

#### **The Great Reformation**

The doctrine of the 'priesthood of all believers' was re-discovered as part of the Great

Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. You might recognise some of the well-known names behind the Reformation – Luther, Calvin, Zwingli, Savonarola and others. Up until then it had generally been forgotten or neglected.

The church was effectively made up of two groups: the clergy and the laity. The reformers began to see in the Scriptures that this was never God's intention, and that changed everything.

The clergy did the ministry and were seemingly the 'called' ones – the ones who felt they were God's man or woman for the hour. The laity, which was everyone else (and the majority) had very little understanding of the things of God. They didn't even have access to Scripture until the printing press which opened the way for the Bible to get into the hands of the common people. The world has never been the same since.

The Protestant Reformers grouped around five main beliefs which were:

1. *Sola Scriptura* (which means “by Scripture alone”). In other words, God's Word, not Tradition, is the final authority in all matters.
2. *Sola Fide* (which means “by faith alone:). This is the doctrine of 'justification by faith alone', where it's not our works that save us but faith in God, alone.
3. *Sola Gratia* (which means “by grace alone”). Much like *Sola Fide*, this is about the fact that it's not by our ability or effort but by God's grace that we are saved, and nothing but His grace.
4. *Sola Christo* (which means “through Christ alone”). This means that salvation is only found in Jesus.
5. *Sola Deo Gloria* (which means “Glory to God alone”). So all glory is for God and goes to God, not to a man, a movement, a church or anything else.

There were a number of things the Reformation opposed and a number of things it instituted in the church, many of which were re-discoveries of what Scripture says. Here are some of them:

1. The centrality of preaching as opposed to a religious ritual. (We have to be careful that we don't allow ritual to get in the way of what God has for us and the Church, which can happen so easily.)
2. Opposition to the mass (especially the bread and wine becoming the body and blood of Jesus – known as transubstantiation)

3. Opposition to purgatory (a place of temporary punishment)

4. Opposition to praying to Mary and the Saints

5. The reformation established the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, as opposed to the need for an earthly person to serve as a mediator between us and God. Jesus alone is the mediator between God and man, not a priest or any other.

It's always been God's intention to use a "Kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:6; Rev 1:6; 1 Peter 2:5,9) where all of those in his Church – his chosen people; his 'nation' – are involved in what He is doing.

### **1 Peter 2:5—9**

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.

### **1 John 2: 22 – 27**

22 Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. 23 No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also. 24 Let what you heard from the beginning abide in you. If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, then you too will abide in the Son and in the Father. 25 And this is the promise that he made to us—eternal life.

26 I write these things to you about those who are trying to deceive you. 27 But the anointing that you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone should teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie—just as it has taught you, abide in him.

As you can see in verse 27, we all have an anointing of God that remains with us. We're anointed to serve and minister as this Kingdom of Priests in God.

In Phil 1:1 the letter starts off with Paul and Timothy addressing the "saints" in Christ Jesus. It's interesting to note that the saints get the first mention in the letter before the elders and deacons. Why? Because the saints are the most important. This is the people that God has raised up to serve him, advance His kingdom, and make a difference. Deacons and overseers are offices and functions in a local church, but the priesthood of all believers is the "A-team".

### **Corruption of the priesthood of all believers**

If we trace carefully how this truth was neglected and forgotten until the Reformation we can see certain key factors and worldly ideas that can corrupt our understanding. We have to be careful and not let these things come into our hearts and thinking otherwise our understanding will be corrupted just like it was in the past.

So what can corrupt and undermine our understanding of our function as priests?

- **A religious spirit.** We can become Pharisaical in our understanding and pick up autocratic models of church governance. From there, combining church and state and pegging people at different levels and positions is an obvious outcome.
- **Secularisation of the church.** This is when we begin to apply worldly principles and methods to the church. Once again we establish a hierarchy and we attach importance to position and profile. We may even adapt business models to the church.
- **Fallen human nature**, which defaults to:
  - **Hierarchy.** In Rev 2: 6, 15 Jesus talks about the “Nicolaitans”, whose practices he hates. When you look at what that means it literally breaks down into 'clergy' and 'laity'. We can see that God hates this practice of hierarchy, of setting certain groups of people above another. There's no such thing in the New Testament as a separate clergy and laity. Jesus also addresses this in Matthew 23.
  - **Making Christianity a spectator sport.** We pay to see the show up front and we come to church to receive, not give! People sit in the grand-stand of the churches and either cheer or boo in their hearts. That's sad. We think that someone's getting paid to perform behind the MIC or with their instruments and we're here just to watch it. We come with an attitude of “what am I going to get today?” But the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers says “what am I going to give today?” We have to move away from being spectators to participators.
  - **Apathy and lukewarmness.** Not many in the Church read their Bibles for themselves. Despite all our access to information our generation is very Bible illiterate. A noted Bible teacher has said that not since the Great Reformation has there been such Biblical illiteracy! This prevents us functioning properly. Prayerlessness is another fruit of apathy and lukewarmness. Where there's no conviction we operate out of convenient and comfort; but the “priesthood of all believers” says we operate out of conviction and

commitment.

- **We want superstars.** Superstars always lead to titles and heirarchy and so it goes.

### **The role of leadership**

#### **Ephesians 4: 11-16**

11 And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, 13 until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, 14 so that we may no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes. 15 Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, 16 from whom the whole body, joined 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.

Who is God's people? Us, the priests. We are prepared for works of service. Why? So that the body of Christ may be built up. Until when? Until unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God. So, leadership in the life of the church is to grow us all into these things, as the scripture above so clearly states.

#### **Leaders (elders and deacons) are to:**

- **Set the priesthood free and keep them free**

Perhaps you've heard the statement that what you get saved out of isn't as important as what you get saved into. It's true. If you get saved into something legalistic and full of bondage, it's a tragedy. The role of leaders is to set you free and keep you free.

That doesn't mean leaders let you do whatever you want. There are banks to every river – we want the river of God to flow, so the life of God must be channelled so you can live in the fullness God has for you. So leaders give handles and help, but we never want to put you into bondage. That's not God's intention or ours.

- **Build everyone into Christ and not themselves**

In essence leaders are sign posts to help you on your journey, keeping your eyes on Jesus. We aren't able to always hear God for you but we can hopefully teach you how to hear God for yourself. We

can't work your salvation out for you, you have to do that. We can't make you drink water, you have to. But in this leaders must build away from themselves and build you into Christ.

- **Equip the saints for the work of ministry and their function**

God wants you to function. We aren't going to equip you to sit, soak and then sour. You've been saved for God's purpose. When your purpose submits to God's purpose then you hit first prize.

- **Build up the Body of Christ**

Leaders want to build up this body of Christ so we – this whole body – can be what God has purposed and called us to be, together. Leaders therefore help you find something of your call and purpose and direct you in the way you can go. This is all done so that the body is healthy, so that you're healthy and strong, faithful, prophetic, loving and so on.

- **Bring the priesthood to maturity**

Leaders bring the priesthood to maturity, so that – as the Scripture above says – we're not infants tossed about by every wind and wave of doctrine. God wants us to come to a place of maturity. It's God's ongoing desire that we move to maturity.

Babies are lovely and cute, but it's not so wonderful when someone at 16 is still in nappies! So why, as believers, are we happy with that being the case spiritually?

### **What are we called to do as priests?**

#### **1) We're called to belong to the family of God.**

Priests are not lone rangers, people who work and operate in isolation. We have to integrate. That's why the word priesthood speaks of a unity and collectivity. God's intention is that we operate as a tribe and a family. We need to understand community and family and covenantal relationships.

#### **2) We need to be a contributing part of the body**

Yes, we need to integrate, but then we need to begin to function as a member of the body. Paul uses a whole chapter in 1 Cor 12 to talk about that. There is one body but there are many parts of it that make up this body. If the body is going to be functioning, healthy and whole then every single part is vitally important. When a part is missing or a part is not playing their part, the whole body suffers.



### **3) We are to reflect the holiness of God**

And that of our high priest, Jesus. We do this by living holy lives. Many scriptures attest to that. God has set us apart from sin and impurity for His own purposes – to serve him and honour him and represent him well. We are transformed with ever-increasing glory (2 Cor 3:18).

### **4) Offer praises to God**

#### **Hebrews 13:15**

Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that acknowledge his name.

That's what we do. Not only on a Sunday but we should look for every opportunity. It says we must do it continually – even in the tough times and the dry seasons.

### **5) We are called to work out our own salvation**

And we do it with fear and trembling (Phil 2:12 – 13). You and I must take responsibility for our own salvation and progress in the things of God. Don't blame your Life Group leader if you aren't growing spiritually.

### **6) We intercede for men before God**

Part of our role is we stand in the gap on behalf of others. This is the gap of prayer. We are a praying people. As Jesus intercedes at the right hand of the father we take up his example and intercede for people. See Romans 1:9 where Paul clearly understood what it meant to intercede as a priest.

### **7) We are to represent and present God before men**

By sharing the Gospel in word and deed. It's not just an internal thing, or what we practice on Sunday, but something we live outside of the halls of the Church. We are here to present God to man – representing speaks of our lifestyle; presenting means we have to talk and challenge. Priests make Him known.

### **So how do we do these things?**

- **Get free and stay free.**

Read the book of Galatians and see the challenge. It's for freedom that we have been set free. We're

free from all sorts of things that want to put us back into bondage and legalism and slavery. So let's stay free and not go back to those things.

- **Become Bible literate**

That's how we become this priesthood of all believers. Like Paul said in Col 3 – let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.

- **Develop your own relationship with God and your own convictions**

First-hand revelation is always the best. Second-hand isn't ours and when we try and live off someone else's revelation we wonder why we're not getting anywhere.

- **Live a devoted life from the inside-out.**

Remember your devotion times! They are paramount!

- **Integrate into the body of Christ**

Integrate into Life Groups. Otherwise you remain a visitor for the rest of your life and that's not God's intention or purpose.

- **Get involved and function**

Use what God has given you; serve wherever the need is, wherever you find the opportunity. You don't have to wait to ask to serve.

- **Use what God's given you**

He has given us all gifts, talents and the like. The parable in Matt 25 of the talent is a very good one for this context. Those that were commended used the talents they received. But the third buried and ignored his talent. And the master refers to him as a wicked, lazy servant. If you don't use it you're going to lose it and you don't want that. God has blessed you with it, so use it!

- **Work out your calling**

Every call is important and needed in the life of the Church. Work it out, develop it, grow in it. Not just the gift and ability but the call to open things up to advance the Kingdom.

*Questions to ask:*

1. What does God expect from every believer?
2. What corrupts the Priesthood of All Believers?
3. What is the role of leadership in the Priesthood of All Believers?
4. What is the role of the Priesthood?

## Part 5

### Being a Contributing Part of the Body of Christ

Download the audio version of this teaching from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/being-a-contributing-part-of-the-body/>

In part 4, we looked at what the priesthood of all believers is about. In this part, we'll be looking at how one integrates and functions in the Body of Christ.

#### What defines the Church?

The church isn't an organisation or a building but is a group of people. So, we are the church. When we say we're going to church we mean we're going to be with God's people, a local group of God's people, not that we're going to a building.

Essentially, two words define the local church (a local group of people): *Integrated* and *Functioning*.

If we're going to be a contributing member to a church then we need to integrate – in other words, we need to actually belong to that church. Sometimes we talk of 'that church' or 'their church' or 'our church', which is good, but it's even better when it becomes 'my church'. This points to ownership and belonging.

Functioning means we are involved. It means we're participating, not spectating. If we don't have a true understanding of the church, if we see it as an organisation or religious institution, then we end up being spectators.

#### Scriptural definitions of the Church

The Bible talks about the Church as a bride; a temple; a family; a tribe and more besides. But there is one that speaks very loudly and clearly and that is a 'body'. You find Paul use this analogy in 1 Corinthians 12 and Romans 12, particularly.

In these Scriptures it says that Jesus is the head of the body while we, the priesthood of all believers, are the rest of the body. We have to understand that the body is made up of many inter-dependant parts that are not always the same, don't always look the same, or act or function the same. It's made up of a wide variety of parts and yet together we make up the full ministry and function of Jesus, who we represent to the world. We are His hands and His feet to the world. It's a wonderful privilege and responsibility He's given to us.

No one part of the body is more important than the other. Look at your own body – just as important as your eye is, so is your ear. This is the point Paul makes in 1 Corinthians 12.

If we ever think a part is not important and that part doesn't play its role, then the body suffers as it's not living in the fullness and function God had for it. We must therefore fulfil our roles otherwise the entire church suffers.

Here are some other Biblical pictures of the church:

### **1 Peter 2: 4 – 6**

4 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 For it stands in Scripture:

“Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious, and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame.”

Peter portrays the church as a living, spiritual house, with Christ as the foundation and cornerstone and every believer a stone in that house. One stone is not a temple or a wall, just like one part of the body doesn't make up the whole body and is not effective without the others. Both of these pictures speak about why Christianity is not just about believing but also about belonging. Belonging only happens in a local church.

### **Hebrews 10: 24, 25**

24 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

If we're not integrated then how are we going to stir someone else on to love and good deeds? How are we going to encourage others to press on and stand firm in what God has called them to do? And how are you going to be spurred on unless there are others around you who are able and willing to do that?

### **Rom 12: 3 – 8**

3 For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith

that God has assigned. 4 For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, 5 so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. 6 Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; 7 if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; 8 the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.

And so one body, different members, each with different opportunities to serve God and add value and make a difference to use the gifts, talents and anointings that God has given so that the body can be built up; otherwise the body suffers.

### **1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 30**

12 For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. 13 For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

14 For the body does not consist of one member but of many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” that would not make it any less a part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would be the sense of hearing? If the whole body were an ear, where would be the sense of smell? 18 But as it is, God arranged the members in the body, each one of them, as he chose. 19 If all were a single member, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, yet one body.

21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you,” nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.” 22 On the contrary, the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and on those parts of the body that we think less honorable we bestow the greater honor, and our unpresentable parts are treated with greater modesty, 24 which our more presentable parts do not require. But God has so composed the body, giving greater honor to the part that lacked it, 25 that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 26 If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together.

27 Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. 28 And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. 29 Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? 30 Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

Two key elements that are vital to be part of the body and our understanding of local church. Integrated and functioning. Let's look in more detail:

## **Integrated**

The church is not attending meetings or going to a building. It's about being connected through accountable relationships. Because of my relationships with others in the church, when there's a degree of accountability, when I'm not around someone will check up on me. But if I'm not connected, who is going to know when I'm not around?

We're all connected to the Head (Jesus) and then we're connected to each other. This takes place at local church and its different aspects – Life Groups being one of those – where you are able to hold meaningful relationships where they hold you accountable and you hold them accountable. So I work out my salvation through those vital relationships.

If we think of the cross we see it goes vertically and horizontally. Horizontally is you and I, vertically is you and God. Sometimes we just focus on the vertical and think it's just about God and I; or we leave God out the equation and we think it's all about relationships. No, both are important, our relationship with the Father through Jesus and with those around us.

The enemy's strategy is to kill, steal, destroy, remove and separate. The enemy wants to isolate you, looking for someone to devour. If you've seen how a lion hunts, they disperse the herd and look for a victim either on its own or who they can separate. And the enemy operates the same way – he wants to isolate us, have us climb our miff trees, and be out of fellowship, because that makes us easy pickings to him. There's incredible safety and security in the herd, in the church, in accountable relationships. We need them.

Scripture says submit to one another out of reverence for Christ, so we do this in our reverence for him.

## **Responsibilities of fellowship**

How do we conduct ourselves in God's household as family members?

### **1. Relational integrity and maturity**

Scripture must be the foundation that we build our relationships from and relational maturity resonates with **Colossians 3: 5 – 17**.

5 Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. 6 On account of these the wrath of God is coming. 7 In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. 8 But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self[d] with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. 11 Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

12 Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, 13 bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. 14 And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Integrity is discerning the difference between right and wrong; then you act on what that discernment is; and then you live it out. Relational integrity is when you decide that Scripture is your final authority and then you carry that out to relationships.

The scripture above talks about putting off the old self with all its practices of lying and anger and so on, and to put on the new self. So this is what we do in the Church. We don't live this in a vacuum but practice it in love towards others. Relational integrity says we honour those around us. Jesus commands us in John 13:34 to love one another.

Love and grace need to be the new language we speak as believers. This is what we exercise in all our relationships. See also Gal 5:22, 23 and Philippians 2. We no longer do anything out of selfish ambition but consider others better than ourselves in humility. These are the standards for relational integrity. If we're convinced that Scripture is from God then we need to operate that way.

The opposite of integrity is hypocrisy, a stench in the nostrils of the Father in heaven.

Maturity is about growing up and producing fruit, where it's no longer about me but now about others. I honour others above myself, I show brotherly love. See 1 Pet 2:17. Relational integrity and maturity honours the King.



## **2. Live healed**

So, with the above in mind, we now live healed – emotionally and spiritually. We can't afford to hold grudges and climb our miff tree and stay offended. If we're going to believe what Scripture says and put it into practice, we can't have any time for that. It's hypocrisy to say we've forgiven the person but meanwhile we're grumbling and muttering under our breath. Living healed means we realise ahead of time that someone is going to hurt us and offend us (it's a guarantee) and we decide to forgive and love ahead of time. You must choose to live healed

Some things do take long to get over but we must do what Matthew 18 says – go to the person, not to someone else, and work it out with them.

## **3. Holding short accounts**

We can't afford as new creatures (Col 3) to hold grudges. Love covers a multitude of sins. If we're operating in love all the time, no matter what happens we can forgive. See Matthew 5: 22 – 24.

## **4. Loving, forgiving and honouring**

Not just when we feel like it. At all times. See Matthew 18:21 onwards. We must truly forgive, not just say it. We need to get the Word in us and live out that Word out in our relationships.

## **Functioning: living as a church**

Let's take six pictures that the Bible uses to portray the church to show how relationships need to move from friendship to partnership in the church. We will cover exactly what that means after we have looked at these six pictures.

How else does the Bible portray the church?

1. As a body (which has been covered above)
2. As a nation – think of a people group, families, cultures, languages, or a tribe (Ephesians 2:12-13)
3. As a family – a household (Ephesians 2:19; Romans 8; John 1:12)
4. As a bride (Ephesians 5:22-32)
5. As a building (also covered above in less detail) (Ephesians 2:21; 1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

6. As an army (Ephesians 6:10-18)

7. As a priesthood (1 Peter 2:5, 9)

There is something all six of these have in common, which gives us an interesting clue as to how we're meant to function in Christ. It's that none of these pictures allow for an individual to live isolated.

For example, a bride can only be a bride if she has a groom; an army can only be an army if it has soldiers – a soldier is a soldier on his own, but with others he is now an army; a brick doesn't make a building, it requires many bricks to make a building; a priesthood is not a priest, it is a picture of many priests; and so on.

So what does this mean? *We get our identity as Christians in the Lord based on the identity of someone else.* That's the only way we can exist.

It means we give up a certain part of our own identity in order to become part of something bigger. So a bride no longer stops being a woman but she gives up a lot of her independence to become a bride. A soldier doesn't give up his identity as a soldier, but he takes on a bigger corporate identity in an army. A brick continues to be a brick but gives a part of its identity to be part of a bigger whole.

### **Functioning: how do our relationships form?**

So the above is how we see God expects us to function. There are three levels of relationship we have in the church – *friendship, relationship and partnership.* And it's not until we move into the third level that we truly start feeling like that soldier, brick or part of the family as we see above.

#### **1. Friendship**

This is when a relationship is very simple and on the surface. It's not that all relationships we have must be deep and serious. But in the body of Christ we need to move from friendship to relationship which is a little bit deeper.

#### **2. Relationship**

You can only get to this level – a level where we now have a covenant with each other, where we're committed to love each other despite our weaknesses and warts – by being vulnerable. And often we're most vulnerable when we invite people into our house and show them our weaknesses, which is precisely what happens at Life Group. So you're going to have to have a level of trust. You are going to get hurt and that's how it works.

### 3. Partnership

This is where we want to get to. This is when we're doing something together, we're functioning together.

In Cornerstone and our greater NCMI relationships we've always had this value of 'friendship before function' and we still hold to that value. But don't be misled. Some people think it means that all we're going to be is friends and we're never going to function. But actually it means we're friends while we function. Because a good friendship is built in the process of doing something together. Why? Because you're growing, learning, being vulnerable; you're at your most frustrated, and so on.

We can only really be functioning as Christians if we are in partnerships. We can only have an identity when we are walking it together. That means we have to give up a little bit of who we are – not that you don't have an identity – but it means you don't consider your identity more important than the corporate identity. That's very important.

This is why it's essential for you to know your job and calling in this church, because if you're not doing it then I'm losing out on part of my identity. A teacher can't be a teacher if no one is sitting and learning from him. He'd be a mad guy talking to an empty auditorium.

Get involved, partner together, find something that is your identity that you can walk alongside with somebody else, for you and for the one walking alongside you.

*Questions to ask:*

1. What does it mean to be integrated into a local church?
2. How do I function in my local church?
3. What defines relational maturity?
4. Am I connected in to the body?
5. Am I operating in the function God has destined for me?

## Part 6

### Our discipleship, shepherding wineskin

The audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-our-discipleship-shepherding-wineskin/>

In Part 5 we looked at what it means to be a contributing part of the body of Christ. In this part we will look at what shepherding is in more detail.

#### The motivation for shepherding

##### **Matt 9:35—38**

35 And Jesus went throughout all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the gospel of the kingdom and healing every disease and every affliction. 36 When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them.” That’s our saviour. But it’s amazing how differently it’s been with leaders throughout the ages, where rather than being moved by compassion they’ve seen the crowds and sought to take advantage of them.

When Jesus feeds the five thousand and the four thousand (Matt 14: 13 – 21; 15:32) the Scriptures reiterate how he was moved by compassion.

Remember the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15? Aren’t you glad that that’s God’s response to a person who was incredibly lost and practically a basket-case. What would our response be to a son who took his inheritance like that? But God is always motivated by love – it doesn’t matter what our needs are, He is always motivated by love. Ahead of time He is already loving us.

#### **We are motivated by love**

If love isn’t the chief motivating force in your life, you need to go back to your Father and let it happen there. *As leaders we can’t afford to basically be “let loose” on people and not be motivated by love.*

There are scriptures that warn us strongly against not loving and shepherding (see Ezekiel 34 and Jeremiah 23:1—8). God gives a very strong warning against false shepherds who fleece the flock and

are not concerned about the sheep but only about their own thing and themselves.

Jesus makes His statement on the shortage of labourers in Matthew 9 above in the context of where He was teaching and making disciples. This wasn't said in a classroom somewhere. So we see that shepherding is not for maintaining a flock but for the sake of taking the nations. God is saying, in our discipling, forward moving, apostolic nature, that we're called to really care, to be moved by compassion, to teach and proclaim and heal for the objective of truly loving people because they are harassed and helpless.

There are many that see opportunity in the church but when difficulty arrives they bail. But God is looking for those who stick it out.

### **Additional motivations for shepherding**

#### **Matt 28: 18—20**

And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 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, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

- God is interested in making disciples, not converts. We're motivated with the same objective.
- We're to be motivated by relational maturity

We want people to move on from being babies in Christ to relational maturity. Life Groups give new disciples some kind of connection, the kind a Sunday morning can't give.

People fight with each other. They don't know how to forgive and honour each other. We see it even in Acts 6 where the deacons are tasked to help a relational problem (read the scripture for more context). So we get in amongst them and bring about relational maturity.

### **Relational maturity has three stages**

#### *1. Friendship only*

We're always the perfect friend when we first meet. We're all comfortable to stay on this level as we don't want anyone to know what's hidden away (and it's also uncomfortable knowing everyone else's weaknesses too). A lot of people will come week on week to church and they don't want to experience a Christianity with relationships that go deeper. But it's our job to help people mature to relationship.

## 2. *Relationship*

Here it's about covenant, where we find the warts we all have. Through covenant we commit ourselves to each other despite our warts.

We have a relationship with each other not because of each other but because of Christ. That's maturity. Being miff, reserving our rights and easily criticising are things we have to work on. We're all only one sentence away from criticism; we're all quick to give opinions and quick to want forgiveness. But we're slow in asking for forgiveness or even giving it.

But we lean on the love of Christ and our Father. Then we move onto partnership.

## 3. *Partnership*

Once we move from friendship into relationship we move into partnership where we go and do ventures together for God. We see in the book of Acts where Paul and Barnabas were separated in the Antioch church for a partnership in ministry.

Our biggest job as leaders is going to be relationships – so you yourself have to learn how to forgive in advance. Some of us go into our 'miff tree' on occasions and we feel sorry for ourselves and believe that everyone else is wrong. But some of us camp there and run electricity and everything. We live there and it's going to take a revival to shake us out of there.

We have to win in this area as leaders. Christ forgave us ahead of time, not just on the day we asked for forgiveness. That's how we should forgive, ahead of time. It doesn't matter what group you decide to belong to, you're going to be let down. So we must forgive ahead of time so we don't get hurt when people offend us. Sure, we handle hurting issues (and we do it Biblically) but we have to learn to be forgivers. We can't afford for leaders to be the ones always sitting in their miff trees. We don't withhold forgiveness, we live in it constantly.

People often come to a church and initially love it. But give it time. In the quest to find the perfect group of people, people cause themselves a lot of unhappiness. Just settle this in your heart. When you're at your local church and have decided on it you must stay long enough to produce fruit. Jesus' team must have had incredible fighting – Jesus didn't choose run-of-the-mil guys, they were opposites! Simon the zealot belonged to a group that used to kill tax collectors, yet Jesus calls him and Matthew.

Build everyone into Christ and His apostolic purpose. Even though there's a nice social element to Life Groups it's not about fun and games but the serious business of discipling and shepherding. We build

them not into ourselves or our church's cause, but the body of Christ.

### **Big things happen in small groups**

- Every Life Group meeting is an opportunity for an outpouring of the Spirit, for something to happen that's not the mundane. We've got to stick with it, even through evenings where it's boring. Some of the biggest changes in peoples' lives are going to be in small groups.
- We can only properly care for the flock in and through small groups where discipling takes place. This is where we get into each others' lives and where there's vulnerability and where we trust God together.
- We don't build a professional 'counseling' culture. People must learn to go to the Father (in discipling this is what we teach them). Otherwise we start requiring specialist counselors and professionals and the counselor becomes the life group. Rather, we want to build them into the life of a church with a Life Group.
- In a small group you learn where your strengths are.
- The best way we can shepherd responsibly is in a Life Group where people bear fruit. You can't declare you're a part of the church if you're not – what are you a part of if you attend Sundays only? That's attending a meeting, but we connect to our church through and in a Life Group.

### **Deacons' main responsibilities in shepherding**

Deacons work with the elders and under their oversight as they care and shepherd in a small group. Here are some of the deacons' main responsibilities:

#### **1. Love the sheep**

However we handle the sheep it must be in love. Even when we correct, because that's always done with the hope of redemption and repentance.

- **We support the sheep**
- **We pray for them**
- **We council them**
- **We teach them**
- **We encourage them.** This is sorely missing in the body of Christ. With our culture, we live

under criticism and cynicism most of the time. We're always told where we lack and how we aren't performing well enough.

7. We respect them

## **2. Lead the sheep**

- We lead by example (Hebrews 13:7).
- We make sure we're prepared
- We have a servant heart
- We are willing to yield to others
- We must be patient
- We look to empower the sheep
- We create opportunities for them
- We take them where they may not necessarily want to go (but must go)
- We show them the vision (of the church) and help them understand how it applies to them.
- We show them how to integrate into the church
- We help them to discover their giftings and their function
- We pray with and for them
- We help them with the Word of God
- We serve them

## **3. Feed the sheep**

- Teach them how to read the Word and live it; how to practice it. We ought to be doing this in our own lives so that we can teach properly!
- Celebrate the discipline of reading the Word and knowing it. We don't download thoughts from the Internet and get on board with the latest fad. We need our own revelation. Every one of us should know our Scriptures.

### **Additional shepherding responsibilities:**

- Look to integrate the fringe, frail and fragile. Go and look at those at the back of the church on Sundays and take care of them.
- Gather wherever and whenever you can. Shepherd's gather. Part of God's rebuke in Ezekiel 34 to the bad shepherds is that they don't gather the flock anymore. It doesn't matter what gift you have, if you don't gather you're going to scatter the sheep. Ask God to show you how to gather.
- Draw in new people. Look for them before and after meetings. Some of them stand around, waiting. We must discipline ourselves in this.



- Help the elders in praying and ministering to people in meetings and other relevant times.
- Facilitate people becoming friends. Introduce people to each other.
- Shepherds sort out relational issues
- Be a source of information. Know what's going on in the life of your church. Not just the information but where the church is going.
- Be a source of hope. When they come to you, there is always hope.
- Be pro-active. Don't wait for people to get sick or backslide. A good shepherd prays ahead of time and asks God who needs the phone call.
- Be all of this with your away-game as well, outside of meetings. You're a deacon everywhere. God will lead you to people that need to be shepherded.

The next two parts will focus more on the practicalities of leading a Life Group, starting with the practical expectations of deacons.

*Questions to ask:*

1. Why is shepherding so important?
2. What is the motivation and goal of shepherding?
3. How does shepherding work in this local church?

## **Part 7**

### **Being Part of a Life Group**

An audio version of this teaching can be downloaded from <http://cornerstonechurch.co.za/life-groups-being-part-of-a-life-group/>

In this final part of this series we will talk about what being part of a Life Group is all about and re-iterate its importance in the life of the priesthood.

#### **Visitors' process**

It's good to know the process we follow to welcome new people into Cornerstone or give them an idea of who we are and what we're about. This helps you see the importance of a Life Group and why it's a fundamental part of church life.

Note, we will never over-administrate anyone. We don't want people to feel as if they're just part of a process. Rather, we want to connect with them personally and help them personally.

We've dubbed our visitors lounge the “valley of decision” because people make life-changing decisions there and we see that every Sunday. People come to visit for all sorts of reasons. Some are here on business. Some are genuinely seeking a relationship with Jesus and so they thought that coming to a church would be a good way of doing that. Some have walked away from Jesus and are being honest about that and on Sunday mornings they're making decisions to take this road up again. Others are just looking for a group of friends.

Some are looking for a new church and still some are disgruntled with their current church.

This last group are usually encouraged to please sort things out with their current church before coming to Cornerstone. We believe that if you come in through the front door of a church you leave through the front door! If people sort out their problems with their current church then they can dispose of their baggage and not keep taking the same baggage with them wherever they go. After a little while of being here they'll be disgruntled again because those hurts haven't been dealt with.

We encourage guys to honour their leaders. If you've been in any kind of leadership role – whether is church, business or something else – you know how you pour your life into those you're working with. We believe it's good to honour that. We can't hold their hand to do this but we encourage them to do it.

Some people like to go around from church to church and are in a perpetual state of shopping. But they're missing out on integrating into a body and functioning in a body; they're missing out on a vital piece of their Christianity. We try and encourage people to integrate, if not here then somewhere, and

part of our process with newcomers is to help them do that.

God has not made junk and has put a skill inside each of us that someone else may not have. And even if you feel like a cookie-cut of someone else (and you feel they may be better at what you do) there's something in you that is of worth, because God has called you. He called you to be his child - not me, not us – He has done it.

So let's follow the process of a Sunday morning when we welcome visitors:

1. Generally, we find most visitors to Cornerstone come on a Sunday morning
2. In the Sunday morning meeting, we ask for people who are new to put their hands up, and we hand them our Visitors Card.
3. Just putting up the hand is a big deal for many people as not all people are that outgoing.
4. We invite people to fill out that card and bring it with them to the Visitors Lounge (at the back of the auditorium in Cornestone Bedfordview) to meet us. This is a huge step for many people and we need to honour their guts in coming. Our culture doesn't encourage this sort of thing.
5. At the Lounge we talk to them over a cup of coffee / tea and a treat about Cornerstone and tell them about two things – DNA and Life Groups.
  - **DNA** – this is our four week course where we tell people exactly who we are, what they can expect from us and what we expect from them. We're very upfront in this course. Why? Because many times you could be part of a church for years and only discover later that they believe something you can't get on board with. In this course we want to be open, honest and to the point, and after those four weeks you should have enough ammo to hold us accountable to how we live our lives as a corporate body.
  - **Life Groups** – Why do we tell them about this? Because it's another thing to do in the week? No, it's because no man or woman is an island.

In Gauteng we like this 'appointment' lifestyle. We like to keep ourselves at arms' length, but we have to get past that attitude. Many people turn away from a big church like this because they say they're a small church kind of person. But many people who have pushed through that notion can't believe that this is a big church, because its friendly and it feels like a small church even though it's in such a big setting.

That's a huge testimony to the saints, not to the elders. Because the saints are in the Life Groups and that's the life of the church. You're the ones welcoming the newcomer, being hospitable, helping people move, etc.

6. Then we offer them a follow-up. If they would like to do that, a team goes to visit them in their home. Then it's outside of the context of a lights and a fancy coffee. It's quiet and in their home where they're comfortable. But by inviting us in that shows guts and commitment and can be the seed for a great relationship.

7. These moments in the Visitors Lounge will be fundamental for the visitors in understanding if they want to be part of this spiritual group of believers in Jesus.

8. The person who speaks to them at the Visitors Lounge writes down additional details at the back of the card and gives that to us as the elders.

9. We take these details and capture them on a spreadsheet that the elders share. This is so we can follow up on them.

10. If people want to be called in a month, we record it, and then do it. We don't want to promise something and not do it. We want to be god stewards of our administration but we want to make sure people don't feel part of a process.

11. An elder will phone them in the week to give them a quick thank-you and maybe speak to them about DNA and Life Group in more detail if that's what they indicated they would like.

We value these moments of decision in the Visitors' Lounge. We want to honour God with the work He's called us to and we want to help people integrate and function in a local body so they can enjoy all God has for them and get on with the call on their lives and the call God has placed on the Church. We want them to find their part to play in this exciting mission God has given us.

### **A culture of being served**

in 1840, over 90 percent of the American population was involved in agriculture. Then the industrial revolution happened and the Second World War and the U.S. became the biggest economy in the world. Now, 23 percent of its working population are involved in making something. Everyone else is involved in services where you're not actually producing anything. Less than three percent of its population is involved in agriculture.

If you track the history of involvement in the churches in the U.S. alongside the development trend mentioned above, you come to some interesting conclusions. The U.S. used to have some of the

highest involvement in churches compared to anywhere else in the world as there used to be a culture of work, producing and getting involved. But now, as most of the population is involved in services, people come to church to be served.

We are very much a part of this Western culture where we arrive and want to be served. When you go further north into Africa you find some churches have meetings three times a day, every day. Even guys who work will come to these meetings. And everyone's involved – they all sing, they all contribute in some way. Why? Because there isn't a culture of service, most people are involved in other kinds of work and work that requires contribution is a part of their life.

This culture of expecting to be served has unfortunately worked its way into the Church in a big way. We need to break this mindset because we are not here to be served but are here to serve.

We do need to follow up on people and that's a process that we've just gone through. But if that doesn't happen, will they stay? How much of a revelation have we had of Jesus that even if no one calls us again we will still keep coming to church? That's the difference between coming to be served or coming to serve.

Before we can function as the priesthood of all believers we need to have a revelation of Jesus. If you want friends, be a friend. If you want someone to follow up on you, you follow up on them. If you want someone to pray for you, you pray for them. If you want someone to give to you, you give to them. That's how life works in the Kingdom. We don't see that in the world, but let's not live like the world does.

Engage, be involved, know what's going on, interact, ask questions - that's how you're going to get involved in this church. The only way you're going to get to meet people and make friends is to get on board with what we're doing. Because if you haven't noticed it yet, we're a very busy church. There is so much going on. And the best way to make friends is to do something with them, to walk alongside them.

## **What is a Life Group?**

### **1. A place to serve one another**

How else can you serve except to be around people to serve? Making yourself dinner is not service. You need to be integrated into somewhere before you can serve.

### **2. A place to build relationships**

The Scriptures teach us how to love and relate to others. You can't live the Scriptures unless you have

a relationship with other people. It's not possible.

### **3. A place to exercise your gift**

The smaller context of a Life Group makes this possible and more practical. But you can't practice if you're not in a Life Group and in a community. If you're sharing prophetic words on your own, in your bedroom, you've got a problem.

### **4. A place where you grow and mature**

### **5. A place of encouragement**

### **6. A place where we can be vulnerable and transparent**

We're all very proud and like for everyone to think we've got it all together. We want this unreal, idyllic world that doesn't exist.

### **7. A place where you can be accountable**

This means you are transparent and people know what's going on in your life. Why on earth would you want someone else to help you with your decision making? Because we all fall short and we're a family. If I stand here and share my weakness, it's going to make you feel more comfortable to share yours. If I get a little bit of perspective, maybe someone can give me insight just by talking about it. Encourage means to give someone courage. And we all need that!

## **What is a Life Group “not”?**

### **1. A place to gossip**

### **2. A social club**

While it is a social gathering that's not its only purpose. There are plenty of great social clubs available.

### **3. A religious gathering**

It's a community of friendships, not a place of laws and rules. But the fact that it's primarily a relational thing makes it so complicated! Because relationships are complicated! Yet, we can only mature and grow in relationship. It's easy to read the Bible, but you can only work it out in relationship. It doesn't happen any other way!

#### **4. A place of judgement**

We don't come to Life Group to puff ourselves up and judge everyone else who's got it wrong and is living wrong. The church is called to love not to judge.

#### **5. A place to push your agenda**

The Life Group is about your church not your thing. Sometimes we feel that the Life Group gives us an opportunity to push things in the direction we want and that direction is opposite to where the elders are leading us. Using a platform that was given to you for the purpose of building this church for your own agenda lacks integrity. This is not what Life Groups are about.

The elders encourage Life Groups to be a place where people can ask questions, where they can discuss things and so on. But if you're not sure about what the elders are doing and why, discuss it with the elders. Why sow discord or doubt in the minds of others? Sort this out with the elders directly.

#### **What happens at a Life Group**

It's your responsibility to ensure your Life Group is all these things above, not your Life Group leader. Sure, they do carry the responsibility, but they really can't do it without you.

Generally we try and do the following things at a Life Group:

- **Facilitate worship**
- **Cultivate contribution**
- **Teach and apply the truth**
- **Facilitate relationships**
- **Multiply and plant**
- **Impact the community**
- **Raise up leaders**
- **Lead yourself**

When it comes to facilitating relationships:

- You need to give if you want to get
- You need to help people integrate
- You need to help create a culture of encouragement
- You need relational responsibility

- You need to develop community

### **Cultivating a contribution in a Life Group**

- **Every single person is valuable to God and to His people.**

You are not a number or just part of the mass. You're unique, an individual created in the image of God in such a beautiful and wonderful way.

God has gifted and anointed you. So you have a gift, anointing and ministry that God has given to you that He wants you to exercise. It's one thing having it, it's another thing using it. An anointing is a supernatural empowerment of God to fulfil a task, to accomplish something for him. So we must use what God has given to us. Get what the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 is saying – if you don't use it, you lose it.

- **Come prepared when you come to Life Group**

Don't just sit and receive from the leader. If you want to receive, learn to give first. Jesus said it's far better to give than receive. Come prayed up, ready, having waited on God.

- **Your gift will always make room for you**

We don't have to force things and make them happen, your gift will make room for your contribution. The Life Group leader will make room for you to contribute and participate. So therefore be ready. A Life Group leader who doesn't isn't very good.

- **Being a contributing member of the body**

Understand this in Life Group, just like you are in church.

- a) We contribute with our time.
- b) with our talents
- c) with our treasures - finances (meals etc.), to the financial responsibility of the church.

Your prayers are powerful and effective, so pray those prayers. Life Groups are a great forum and opportunity for us to pray, together.

You have a story. Tell it. Our testimony's also grow and develop, it's not just about what God did 25 years ago but maybe what he did 25 minutes ago, hours ago. We need to have an ongoing testimony. We should all have a story to encourage, develop and help others.



- **Exercise your gifts**

**1 Cor 14: 26**

26 What then, brothers? When you come together, each one has a hymn, a lesson, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Let all things be done for building up.

We can't always do this in a big forum but in a Life Group it can happen effectively. And so why is this done? For the strengthening of the church. Not the building, the people!

- **Be willing to be stretched**

Because that's when you grow. When you do things that might not come easy or naturally or you think someone else could do it better. But by me doing it, I'm going to grow. If we're going to operate in spiritual gifts we must be stretched.

- **Be available or willing to lead when asked**

Be faithful if you're given something to do. Even be open to leading a group if the elders ask.

- **Don't resist multiplication of the group**

Sometimes it becomes a comfortable enclave, and then if anything rocks it we freak. But for the purposes of growth, sometimes God has to do that. Don't dig your heels in but be part of what God is doing.

- **Be outward in your focus**

As much as it's about relationship and building each other up, etc. It's also a great opportunity to have impact and make a difference together somewhere (a hospital etc.). If the world is not our parish, then our parish becomes our world. The life group is not our world.

*Questions to ask:*

1. What kind of heart / expectation should I come to my Life Group with?
2. What's expected of me in my Life Group?
3. What's expected of the leader in my Life Group?