

CARING FROM THE CLIFFS

WC2022—Breakout Session

October 1, 2022

What first comes to your mind when you think of ministry?

“And Jesus came and said to them, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 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’”
(Matthew 28:18-19)

What comes to your mind when you think of the Church?

“There is no more robust and doxological (praise) foundation upon which we can build a definition of the church than the eternal work of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In the words of eighteenth-century pastor-theologian Jonathan Edwards, the whole world was created so that ‘the eternal Son of God might obtain a spouse.’ The church is not a Trinitarian afterthought in response to man’s fall in the garden—quite the contrary. **The church is the focused domain where all God’s presence, promises, and purposes are unveiled and eternally realized...**

The church’s life is beautifully framed by her position as the reward to Christ for His suffering on the cross, thus making Christ a worthy groom for His bride... **There’s never a time when He doesn’t extend His whole heart to her. There is never a time His heart isn’t captivated by her** (Song 4:9)... To grasp Christ’s love for His church is to plumb depths that have no bottom, find a treasure with no bounds, and climb heights that have no peak. As believers, we never move past the love of Christ. We never tire of the love of Christ.” (*The Loveliest Place*, Dustin Bengé)

What does He pray for her?

²⁰ "I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be **one**, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be **one** even as we are **one**, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become **perfectly one**, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. ²⁴ Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world. ²⁵ O righteous Father, even though the world does not know you, I know you, and these know that you have sent me. ²⁶ I made known to them your name, and I will continue to make it known, that the love with which you have loved me may be in them, and I in them." (John 17:20-26)

"As Jesus looks back on His public ministry and all it was meant to accomplish and forward to the cross and all it was ordained to produce, His focus is riveted on community! Of all the things that Christ could pray at this moment He prays for the unity of His people." (*Relationships A Mess Worth Making*, Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp)

The Image of God is a Community! "We are image bearers of God. We exist as a living reflection of God, who exists in eternal community." (*Community*, Brad House)

I. Community

The book of Revelation, the Epistles, and how the Church is revealed in Scripture.

1 Peter 2 "These are corporate identities- race, priesthood, nation, and people. As the church we need to recapture our sense of community and connectedness to one another."

(Community, Brad House)

The dizzying (and humbling) "one-anothers":

- Do not wrong (Lev. 25:17)
- Show kindness and mercy (Zech. 7:9)
- Speak the truth (Zech. 8:16)
- Be at peace (Mark 9:50)
- Love (John 13:34)
- Be joined (Rom. 12:5)
- Rejoice (Rom. 12:15)
- Weep (Rom. 12:15)
- Live in harmony (Rom. 12:16)
- Love with brotherly affection, outdo one another in showing honor (Romans 12:10)
- Accept (Rom. 15:7)
- Instruct, Counsel (Romans 15:14)
- Greet (Rom. 16:16)
- Agree (1 Cor. 1:10)
- Wait (1 Cor. 11:33)
- Care (1 Cor. 12:25)
- Comfort (2 Cor. 13:11)
- Serve (Gal. 5:13)
- Bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2)
- Forgive, be kind (Eph. 4:32)
- Address one another in psalms hymns and spiritual songs (Eph 5:19)
- Submit (Eph 5:21)
- Bear with (Col 3:13)
- Teaching and admonishing (Col. 3:16)
- Encourage (1 Thess. 4:18)
- Encourage and build up (1 Thess. 5:11)
- Encourage and build up (1 Tim. 5:11)
- Consider how we can spur one another on to love and good deeds (Heb. 10:24)
- Do not speak evil against (James 4:11)
- Confess sins to one another and pray for one another (James 5:16)
- Show hospitality (1 Peter 4:9)
- Minister gifts to one another (1 Peter 4:10)
- Be humble toward (1 Peter 5:5)
- Fellowship with (1 John 1:7)

There are over 59 in the New Testament alone!

“Loving others in these multifaceted ways means that we need to know and understand people well. Love doesn’t happen in abstraction but in **concrete, person-specific ways.**” (*Saints Sufferers and Sinners*, Mike Emlet)

(Commenting on John 13:34-35) “This kind of love requires more than seeing each other just one day a week.” (*How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?*, Keri Folmar)

(Commenting on Heb. 10:24-25 and Col. 3:16) “Do you feel the urgency...? We help others persevere on the long road of obedience by consistently gathering together. We sing, not just for ourselves, but to **enliven the faith of others.** As we sit under God’s Word, we commit to **helping one another follow that Word together.** When we gather we are a picture of heaven that encourages us to remain faithful as we wait for Christ’s return.” (*How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?*, Keri Folmar)

Why are we given gifts? To build the church!

(Commenting on 1Peter 4:10-11, 1 Cor 12:7) “Our focus in the church shouldn’t be determining our spiritual gifts but determining the **needs of the body**... We shouldn’t ask how the church can platform our gifts. We should ask how we can use our gifts according to the needs of the church.” (*How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?*, Keri Folmar)

“Being found by Him we know how others need finding.” (*How Does Sanctification Work*, David Powlison)

“It means not that we should live one life, but a thousand lives—binding ourselves to a thousand souls by the filaments of so loving a sympathy that their lives become ours.” (B.B. Warfield)

II. Who? (Everyone)

“[Our] adoption into the family of God was also a call to ministry, a call to be part of the good work of the kingdom. The overall Biblical model is this: God transforms people’s lives as people bring His Word to others. (Eph. 4:11-16) God has given His church leaders, not to bear the full ministry load of the body of Christ, **but to equip each member to join in God’s work of personal transformation...**

The times of formal, public ministry are meant to train God’s people for the personal ministry that is the lifestyle of the body of Christ.”

(Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands, Paul David Tripp)

“To be an instrument in God’s hands to lovingly and winsomely rescue brothers and sisters caught in sin is a high calling, and one given to **all believers.**” *(Saints Sufferers and Sinners, Mike Emlet)*

Every person is a counselor- the question is what kind?

“We might not even want to think of ourselves as counselors—though from Jesus’ point of view, all of us are already counselors, whether foolish or wise.” **It is into the image of Jesus the Wonderful Counselor that we are all being transformed.** “It is our joy that such a transformation turns churches into communities of wise love.” *(Speaking the Truth in Love, David Powlison)*

“Our *calling* is to care for each other’s souls. We want to bring our struggles to the Lord and to each other so that the church can be strengthened and the world can witness wisdom and love... (Commenting on Ephesians 4) Apparently the Lord is pleased to use ordinary people, through seemingly ordinary acts of love, to be the prime contributors to the maturing of His people. **If you have trusted in Jesus rather than yourself, and you feel weak and unqualified, then you are qualified.**

Then you are called... The goal... is to further shape the culture of your church so that counseling and mutual care of souls become natural features in the body's everyday life." (*Caring for One Another*, Ed Welch)

"God has determined that run-of-the-mill people do most of His work—not experts, not professionals." (*Side By Side*, Ed Welch)

(Speaking about Titus 2:2-10) "The simplicity of this plan is profound. Truth is to be taught in the context of relationships. This is not just the responsibility of the pastor. The communion of the saints is not just a cerebral concept. **Every member has responsibility to every other member.**" (*Women's Ministry in the Local Church*, Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt)

"In the end the best advice for cultivating friendship is not to *find* a better friend but to *become* one." (*Made for Friendship*, Drew Hunter)

III. To What End? (Maturity & James 2, "Not hearers only...")

"The Christian life was reduced to affirming right doctrines that were not adequately applied to daily life. Soon people thought that they were growing because they were acquiring more knowledge..." (*How People Change*, Timothy S. Lane, Paul David Tripp)

"²² But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. ²⁴ For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. ²⁵ But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing." (James 1:22-25)

Background on James

The House on the Rock

²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine **and does them** will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and **does not do them** will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-27)

⁴⁶ "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' **and not do what I tell you?** ⁴⁷ Everyone who comes to me and hears my words **and does them**, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸ he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.^[a] ⁴⁹ But the one who hears and **does not do them** is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:46-49)

"No matter how extensive one's scriptural knowledge, how amazing one's memory, **it is self-deception if that is all that there is...**" (Peter Davids)

"It were an easy thing to be a Christian,

*If religion stood only in a few outward
works and duties,*

But to take the soul to task,

*and to deal roundly with our own
hearts,*

and to let conscience have its full work

*and to bring the soul into spiritual
subjection unto God,*

That is not so easy a matter,

because the soul out of self-love is loath to enter into itself,

lest it should have other thoughts of itself than it would have.” (Richard Sibbes)

“How we share that relationship with others- how we wrestle with understanding truth and struggle to apply it to our lives- is the essence of fellowship... the Spirit often chooses to employ other people as a means of communicating His truth to our ears and heart... **We can ignore teachers, close books, turn off [messages and podcasts]. When we do pay attention, we can conveniently misapply teachings. But the people closest to us, if they are doing their job in fellowship, are not likely to let us ignore God's urging so easily... we *belong* to one another.” (Why Small Groups, C.J. Mahaney)**

“The danger of a church that relies heavily on the pulpit is that we can be **lulled into being content that our people have heard the gospel day in and day out.** James reminds us, however, that if our faith does not produce good works then it is not faith at all...” (Community, Brad House)

(Commenting on Hebrews 3:12-13) “The Hebrews passage clearly teaches that personal insight is the product of community. I need you in order to really see and know myself. Otherwise, I will listen to my own arguments, believe my own lies, and buy into my own delusions... If I am going to see myself clearly, **I need you to hold up the mirror of God's Word in front of me.**” (Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, Paul David Tripp)

“Spiritual growth and maturity simply will not happen apart from our relationships in the local church...” (Why Small Groups, C.J. Mahaney)

“For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth...” (2 Timothy 3:6-7) “Weak women” translates as immature.

“It is the immaturity and thus the weakness of these ‘childish women’ that make them susceptible to the false teachers.” (*Women's Ministry in the Local Church*, Ligon Duncan and Susan Hunt)

Relationships are a “Mess Worth Making”

“Yet this is not simple. Being involved with people is time-consuming, messy, and complicated. From our point of view it is inefficient but from God's point of view it is the best way to encourage growth in grace... That means **we will have to make time for these kinds of friendships to emerge and grow**. We will have to be realistic, too. Close relationships make it more likely that you will sin against someone or that someone will sin against you. There will need to be times of confession and repentance. There will be times that you will need to serve someone when you feel you lack the resources. There will also be times when you will be served! That may not sound like a challenge, but if you are proud, it is the last thing that you want!” (*How People Change*, Timothy S. Lane, Paul David Tripp)

“Relationships are not primarily for our fulfillment. On the contrary, relationships between sinners are messy, difficult, labor-intensive, and demanding, but in that they are designed to result in God's glory and our good as He is worshiped and our hearts are changed.” (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp)

“Wholesome communication is **others centered**. When my words benefit me more than you they lose their shelter from difficulty. Our worship and theology will always be on display in the way that we treat others. Bible study and personal reading fall flat when we miss what Bible study and reading are **meant to do**.” (*Relationships A Mess Worth Making*, Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp)

“Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”(John Owen)

“Managing sin is like setting a small fire and trying to control it with the sound of your voice.” (Charles Spurgeon)

IV. How? (Conversations)

“I was recently asked, **‘What is it like to be still before God, to be in His presence?’**... When a human being is relaxed observe the hands. They do not lie flat. Instead, they are cupped, as if in a natural posture to receive... receive His words, not of condemnation or criticism but of welcome. Receive His touch... of accepting embrace. Receive the sense of His intimate power... of protection and wisdom. Receive the dewdrops of refreshing, deeper, longer, and unlabored breaths; the persuading silence of His outstretched arms; and the settling posture of His welcoming you... All my thoughts words and sighs are directed to Him. Oftentimes, it seems He is the only one who wants them...

By extension, this can be experienced in community. **We can, in conversation, be as Christ to one another, or to another.** God desires that our conversations reflect and ultimately direct us and others to Him. Yet there is a lot working against us...

“...the Puritans understood that **God was intimately aware of their conversations and regarded their words with deep interest...**What would it be like if we knew God cared that much about our conversations and if we took conference seriously? **It might just help close the gap between what we know and what we do...**

“Four tools were employed by those who sat under the teaching of their pastors: listening, note-taking, repeating the sermon, and conference... Pastors know well that **Biblical preaching alone is insufficient to set truths deeply in the heart...** Regular and consistent time in God’s Word must be accompanied by

ways to **get God's Word into us**, such as Biblical meditation and Godly conversations...

“Richard Sibbes suggests that God appoints specific others to help us address our doubts and questions. As he observed, **‘Many go mourning a great part of their days in a kind of sullenness this way, because they do not open their estate to others...’**

“(Quoting *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan)
“They shun the company of lively and warm Christians,’ and **‘After that they grow cold to public duty, as hearing, reading, Godly conference, and the like.’** Christian's inclusion of the lack of conference as a cause of spiritual decline reveals its importance. How great the need to confer with one another's souls on spiritual matters! That need transcends any historical period and is relevant today...

“Discussion may be the consideration or examination of an argument or a talk intended to reach a solution, but *conference* is an informal conversation, a casual yet genuine exchange of thoughts focused on spiritual matters. It incorporates attentiveness to one another's words, thoughts and lives, and has its purpose in **connecting Biblical truths with life experiences**. In this way, participants are strengthened and encouraged and better able to recognize God's work in their lives... intentionality to set aside time and space to focus on God's movements, promptings and nudges. Dallas Willard states “... understood by Jesus, taught by Paul, obeyed by the early church, followed with excesses in the medieval church, narrowed by the Reformers, recaptured by the Puritans, virtually lost in the modern church....’ The main emphasis lies in the coming together of people in private meetings to have an opportunity to ‘set all [Biblical truths] home for the conscience and the heart,’ while conversing over the state of our souls.

This is risky business. We would rather be distracted from the realities of life and our need for life-giving, relational community. It is risky to allow another into the safe places of our lives. These safe places provide a secure and trusted place **but without community, untruths that we hold, harbor, and hide in our safe places** can be expressed in life-denying actions and behaviors that reflect a devaluing of self, others, and God...

“Richard Sibbes compared the Biblical discussion involved in conference to the seed that eventually brings forth a tree... Isaac Ambrose: ...”after we have been in the garden of spices and have felt the savor of Christ’s anointing in church assemblies, let us take some of the flowers away with us and smell them again and again. **Repeated conferring, examining the Word, is as pounding of spices, that will make them smell the more.**” (*The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, Joanne J. Jung)

“We lose the benefit we might have by the conversation of wise men for want of being inquisitive.” (Matthew Henry on Proverbs 20:5)

Tools for Growing as Wise Counselors and to Deepen our Conversations

“When you counsel (or preach) in great and good generalities, people will nod, **but they rarely change.** Jesus works for a turn-the-world-upside-down reorientation and redirection. Ministry needs to know the big picture **but it really gets involved in the rush hour traffic.**”
“The people of God are called to help each other **grow up.** We are called to know and be known by each other. We are called to counsel each other, to be change agents in each other’s lives.”(*Speaking the Truth in Love*, David Powlison)

1.) Pray

“Once we pray for someone we are in the ongoing story of his or her life, **and it is an honor to be there.** We hear information. We hear what is important to [her] and let that settle into our own heart. We pray for [her]. Then we follow up.” (*Side By Side*, Ed Welch)

“**We listen at the intersection of life and heart.**” (*Caring for One Another*, Ed Welch)

“**Ministry traffics in trouble** because Christ enters trouble, lives through trouble, is unafraid of trouble, speaks and acts in trouble. Struggles force us to need God. And we learn to love the way that Christ loves only by experiencing the hard things that He experienced in loving us.” (*How Does Sanctification Work?*, David Powlison)

2.) Follow the Affections

“We hope to learn what is important to the person we’re talking to, which is another way of saying that we hope to hear what is on his or her heart. The way in is to listen for what is dear, what is loved, what is feared, what is hard- **we listen for how someone feels.**” (*Side By Side*, Ed Welch)

God gives us needs and emotions for the purpose of knitting us together- as He knits the body of an infant in his mother’s womb so He knits the body of His church together through shared emotions.

3.) Ask... then ask again (X-Ray Questions, Appendix 2)

“The genius of personal ministry is that it is *personal*. It can take the grand themes of the Great Story and **apply them with utter specificity to the particulars** of an individual’s life. **You cannot minister well to someone you do not know.**” “For personal ministry to be

effective the principle is simple: **Don't assume—ask.** (define terms, play the video, take the time...)...We cannot be content with casual relationships among God's people."(*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp)

4.) 2 Helpful Questions

"What is this person facing in life? What does the Lord say that speaks directly into what you are facing?... I suspect that most of our discipleship efforts do better at teaching people basic theology, Bible knowledge, Christian ethics, God's promises, ministry techniques, and the disciplines of grace than they do at **asking the questions that make all those teachings sparkle with relevance...**"(*Speaking the Truth in Love*, David Powlison)

5.) Think Globally, Act Locally

"This disconnect is the stuff of ministry. The Redeemer says and does one story; how we live is another. So how do you bring truth to life? How do you apply the Word of God? **Connect one bit of scripture with one bit of life.**"(*Speaking the Truth in Love*, David Powlison)

"One bit of Scripture, prayed over, and bedewed with the Spirit and made alive, though it be only a short sentence of six words, will profit you more than a hundred chapters without the Spirit."(Charles Spurgeon)

"Time and attention should be given in conference to the advancement of Biblical knowledge as well as to exploring the states of souls... The **intersection of life experiences with the Biblical truths** that inform those experiences comes to the fore in conference."(*The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, Joanne J. Jung)

6.) Unbalance and Rebalance

“But the burning question remains: *How are disciples made along the way?* This is a practical theology question, a ministry question, a personal question, an interpersonal question...

How can we think about progressive sanctification in a way that **generates ministry traction**? Here is a core premise: ***Ministry ‘unbalances’ truth for the sake of relevance; theology ‘rebalances’ truth for the sake of comprehensiveness...***

The task in any ministry moment is to choose, emphasize, and ‘unbalance’ truth for the sake of relevant application to particular persons and situations... This is how Jesus ministers. In the Gospels, He chooses to say and emphasize certain things, unbalancing the whole truth in order to say the relevant, timely word. When He talks with people He is astonishingly concrete, direct, and specific. He is not comprehensive or abstract. This is because the Gospels capture a series of ministry moments in which Jesus gives people what they need and can handle. By saying one thing, not everything, He is always challenging, always life-rearranging, always nourishing those who are listening... In order to live well yourself and minister well to others, you will want to learn the art of skillful unbalancing. Practical ministry focuses on one truth out of many for the sake of relevance to particular settings and needs.

The unbalance-rebalance dynamic is crucial for how we grow and for how we help others. Understanding this also helps to explain why ‘balanced’ teaching often seems general, non-specific and even dull, while **‘unbalanced’ application sounds pointed, relevant and scintillating**. Teaching that is only balanced is, in this sense pointless. It discusses topics rather than touching people rather than touching people on matters of urgent concern. **Ministry electrifies when it connects something to someone rather than trying to say everything to no one in particular.**” (*How Does Sanctification Work?*, David Powlison)

Closing Thoughts on Everyday Counseling

“One more thing needs to be said about the Love-Know-Speak-Do model of personal ministry. This is not just an aspect of the formal ministry of the local church, but a **lifestyle to which God has called each of us.**” (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp)

“When we see community a series of events, we hold on to our individuality and **see community in terms of what it offers us...** It requires us to see ourselves as a people not just a gathering of people.” (*Community*, Brad House)

“Community is important. **The caution lies in this: our service, regular meetings, caring for one another, fun together, meeting weekly, practicing spiritual disciplines together, sharing the gospel in word and deed, eating together—each of these elements, as needful and critical as they are for growth, have the potential to be empty.** Until and unless these activities create a trusted environment that is conducive to having meaningful conversations, they will remain activities, expectations, and some great shared times together, but they will ultimately eclipse the kind of community and culture where the knowledge of God through His Word is furthered and souls are attended.” (*The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, Joanne J. Jung)

“**We offer people a living, loving presence that puts real flesh and blood on the presence of the Lord. We also do battle with the enemy,** who whispers in the ears of believers, ‘Where is your God now?’ Let the person know that you will not only help her address the problems that she is facing but that you are *with* her and *for* her.” (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp)

“Notice further, amid this disturbing and difficult experience, the astonishing centerpiece of the psalm: ‘Be exalted above the heavens, O God. Let your glory be above all the earth.’ (Ps. 57:5, also see this in Ps.46!) **It is a wonder. Here is the living faith toward which true discipleship aims.** Pointedly placed right in the midst of troubles, this is a whole different way of seeing things and responding. These sentences are the pivot around which everything in the psalm turns. **The people you disciple don’t think this way very often. You and I don’t think this way very often.** People who feel threatened usually react with fear, retaliation, or escapism. They forget the exalted One. **Discipleship aims to help such people remember.”** (*Speaking the Truth in Love*, David Powlison)

What is Ministry of the Word?

“One big reason that we don’t grasp the counseling call of the church is that we wear blinders when it comes to Word ministry. We rightly see that public ministry from the pulpit is crucial, but we often fail to see that interpersonal ministry in conversations is equally so. In fact, the quality of conversations in the church is proof of whether public ministry is succeeding or failing to achieve Christ’s goals.

What comes into your mind when I say “ministry of the Word?” (often one-way communication & public ministry of the Word)

What if I asked a group of people to free-associate “rainbow” and they said red, yellow and orange? (Missing some vital parts: green blue and violet) A central purpose of good preaching and private devotions is to create wise counselors and promote mutual counsel! **Fruitful interpersonal ministry of the Word is the main proof that sermons that sermons and devotions are worth the time and effort.** How do we know this? 1.) Wisdom is a verbal virtue. 2.) Christ’s conversational ministry” (In Mark 7-11, we see Jesus in 26 ministry scenes: 4 involve

action, 4 involve public ministry, **18 involve interpersonal ministry of the Word**) “The public and private ministries of preaching and devotional study are but two legs of a three-legged stool. Interpersonal ministry of the Word is the third leg. It’s the proof of whether or not the furniture can bear the weight...

Counseling Is the Church- “Wise love, intelligent joy, savvy peacemaking, and patient engagement with people over the long haul are what the church is by definition. Counseling is a prime expression of such things. It is what the church (the Wonderful Counselors trainees) is *about*... First and foremost, Christian people (the church) need to become *wise in the face-to-face curing of souls*...**The church is counsel and counseling if Ephesians 4 speaks truly.** Life-changing truth and love is our calling.”
(*Speaking the Truth in Love*, David Powlison)

V. Where Can We Practice This? (Think Small)

(Commenting on Heb. 3:12, Heb. 10:24-) “**We can’t experience this everyday encouragement with everyone in our church.** This command gets traction as we carry it out in smaller networks...” (*Made for Friendship*, Drew Hunter)

“The honesty and transparency required for conference to be most effective demands that **groups be of reasonable size.** It is difficult to promote truthful and candid conversation in large groups.” (under 10, other sources say under 16, ideally 10-12) (*The Lost Discipline of Conversation*, Joanne J. Jung)

Diversity- James warns about favoritism throughout his letter (James 1: 19-27, 2:1-4)

How People Learn

“Most spiritual growth doesn’t come as a result of a training program or a set curriculum. It comes as a result of what I like to call need-to-know or need-to-grow situations... Sermon-

based small groups take this haphazard learning and growing into account. They are perfectly fitted to the way that spiritual growth actually takes place. **The ultimate goal... is to Velcro people to the two things that they will need most when faced with a need-to-know or need-to-grow situation: the Bible and other Christians.** The simplest and best tool I've ever seen for connecting people to one another over the long haul is a sermon-based small group. Nothing compares." (*Sticky Church*, Larry Osborn)

Children and Youth Ministries

The best gift we can give our kids and youth—"the profound and simple gift of a growing mom and dad." (*Community*, Brad House)

Setting New People Into Families

A large percentage of those who decide to stay in a church have been the recipients of someone's personal interest and initiative." (*Why Small Groups?*, C.J. Mahaney)

"Each of you should look not only to his own interests but also to the interests of others."
(Phil 4:2)

"Generally, people can only be made an integral part of the church through their small-group involvement... when a church grows numerically... small groups may be challenged to release leaders to move into a new phase of ministry; embrace new members or leaders; or reform into completely new groups. It is at these times that we find out what we truly believe—whether our vision is for the growth and progress of the church or simply the preservation of our own comfort... Doing this [keeping the larger mission of the church in mind] involves welcoming and making room for new people, actively caring for one another, creatively reaching out with the gospel, and gladly releasing new leaders and new groups to serve the church effectively. In other words it means... Never say 'comfortable!'" (*Why Small Groups*, C.J. Mahaney)

“How long has it been since I have included someone new in my regular activities? Do others feel welcome to become involved in my conversations and activities? What steps have I taken to include someone new in what I am doing? Am I willing to widen my circle of relationships?” (*Why Small Groups?*, C.J. Mahaney)

“If we put all of our efforts into the tangential and neglect the center, we have no fertile ground where people can land and grow.” (*Community*, Brad House)

Employed for Mission

“One of the reasons many believers are unengaged in mission is because they are unengaged in community.” (Ed Stetzer) “The people of God, however, have relational connections to the people of our cities in all the nooks and crannies... we must employ the whole church in the mission of God.” (*Why Small Groups?*, C.J. Mahaney)

“Instead of one teacher with many disciples we create a community of disciples who are discipling one another... In this way, as the Word is preached and then applied in community, we can disciple an entire population effectively and efficiently... Discipling the whole church will take a strategy that incorporates the whole church... What this implies is that community groups are not merely Bible studies or social groups, but they have a responsibility for the ongoing growth of the entire church... community groups are the primary vehicle for care in the church.” (*Community*, Brad House)

“You can have great preaching and teaching, trained leaders and hungry Christians but if you don't have a context where all the elements can be combined, you face disappointment. Sunday meetings are obviously great times for God's Word to be preached, but where and how will the Word be applied? Sunday meetings are great places for people to come together but

how will these people move from being mere acquaintances to becoming accountable to one another? Sunday meetings present great opportunities for the ministry of the Spirit but, logistically, how can everyone exercise their unique, God-given gifts [and how can these gifts be recognized]? Small groups provide an excellent context in which to pursue many of the vital goals of church life that are difficult if not impossible, to pursue on Sunday morning [or in any large group setting- more than 20].” (*Why Small Groups*, C.J. Mahaney)

Closing

“I am hit with the utter simplicity of Biblical personal ministry... [it's] a call to every one of God's children to be a part of what God is doing in the lives of others... It is living in humble, honest, redemptive community with others, *loving* as Christ has loved, and going beyond the casual to really *know* people. It is loving others enough to *speak* the truth to them, helping them to see themselves in the mirror of God's Word. And it is standing with others, helping them to *do* what God has called them to do. It is basically just a call to Biblical friendship! **At the same time there is a grandeur to personal ministry that cannot be captured in words. God is painting His grace on the canvas of human souls...** As we stand with Him on that last day and see the awesome beauty of the universe's most glorious canvas, God's voice will penetrate our worship with these wonderful and mysterious words: 'Well done, good and faithful servants!' **Then we will know that each moment of ministry was worth it. We will know that we have been a part of the most important, lasting, and beautiful thing that has ever been done—redemption.**” (*Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands*, Paul David Tripp)

Love your church. Lay down your life for your church. Pour out your passions and energies to accomplish God's plan for the church. Your small group has enormous potential—harness it for the benefit of your church. For this is where God has called you. This is where He is changing

you. This is where He wants you to leave a committed life behind.”(*Why Small Groups?*, C.J. Mahaney)

“What must we do now? Jesus calls us to row in the right direction no matter how far away the destination seems. Let's aim right and work toward the right ends. Jesus Christ will complete us together in the maturity of His wisdom. Ephesians 4 gives us our *modus operandi* as well as our goal. We are being redeemed... **We must each labor to make our loyalty to the church a significant reality rather than a mere statement of good intentions... I pray “that you will catch a vision that will animate you to press in *this* direction, with all of your might, for as long as it takes.”** (*Speaking the Truth in Love*, David Powlison)

Appendix 1: Resources

The Lost Discipline of Conversation, Joanne J. Jung

Made for Friendship, Drew Hunter

Relationships, A Mess Worth Making, Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp

The Loveliest Place, Dustin Bengé

Everyday Counseling

Speaking the Truth in Love, David Powlison

Side By Side, Ed Welch

Caring for One Another, Ed Welch

How People Change, Timothy S. Lane, Paul David Tripp

Saints Sufferers and Sinners, Mike Emlet

Instruments in the Redeemer's Hands, Paul David Tripp

How Does Sanctification Work?, David Powlison

Small Groups

Why Small Groups?, Edited by C.J. Mahaney

Sticky Church, Larry Osborn

Community, Brad House

Women's Ministry

How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?, Keri Folmar

Women's Ministry in the Local Church, Ligon Duncan & Susan Hunt

Appendix 2: X-Ray Questions to Get to the Heart of the Issue

- 1.) Everything would be perfect if only...
(finish the sentence).
- 2.) What do you want, desire, crave, lust and wish for? What do you serve and obey?
- 3.) What do you seek, aim for, pursue? What are your goals or expectations?
- 4.) What do you fear? What do you not want? What do you tend to worry about?
- 5.) What do you need? What are your "felt needs"?
- 6.) What are you really living for? What matters to you?
- 7.) What do you see as your rights? To what do you feel that you are entitled?
- 8.) In what situations do you feel pressured or tense? When you are pressured, where do you turn?
- 9.) What do you think about? What are your escapes? What do you seek escape from?
- 10.) What do you pray for?
- 11.) How do you spend your time? What are your priorities?
- 12.) What are your idols? In what do you place your trust or set your hopes?
- 13.) Where do you take refuge? Whom do you serve?

Adapted from "How People Change" by Timothy S. Lane & Paul David Tripp (pgs. 163-165)