

## Vision for Home Groups at GBC

Through the years, you've often heard me say, "*We want to create an environment where making disciples is normal.*" Today, I would like to focus on a crucial part of how we do this at GBC. I would like to center on Home Groups. Today, as we prepare to take the Lord's Supper together, I have three questions: 1) Why do we meet in homes? 2) What is the model for our home groups? 3) What can you do personally? The first two questions will serve mainly as explanations and the last question will be heavy on application. So let's begin.

### 1. Why do we meet in homes?

- It is biblical. There are many examples. I will give one. In Paul's letter to Philemon he writes, "*To Philemon our beloved fellow worker and Apphia our sister and Archippus our fellow soldier, and the church in your house.*"
- Church history attests to churches in homes. I am not saying there were no buildings or rented spaces in the early church, but until the 4<sup>th</sup> century it seems to me that the most common meeting place was in homes.
- Being the church is easily accomplished in simple and uncomplicated settings. In other words, if the church is the people of God, we are most like ourselves when we are at home.
- Home groups causes us to "be the church," sharing life together as a body in a way that we could not do at a building. Meeting in homes is a more natural place to meet.
- It is an excellent model for our children, even in discipline.
- It fosters relationships between young and old that is not the norm at the "church building." Instead of segregating, we do the opposite. (speak of other pastors who are having problems because of segregated services.)
- It provides accountability, especially as we fight against sin.
- It allows us to choose deacons and elders based upon biblical qualifications.

2. What is the model for our home groups? There are many places in the NT (OT as well) we could find clear expressions of what to do when we meet together. But, I think Acts 2:42-47 includes most of the things that we should be doing when we meet. Therefore, it is a model passage. Let's look at it together. **“And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.”**

What are some characteristics we see of these home groups with the very first Christians?

- They taught (v. 42). *“They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching.”* I think if you want to be specific for their context, this teaching was the Gospel of Christ as seen in the OT and the teachings of Christ in the previous three years. If you look at the sermons from the book of Acts, we see very simple preaching that reflect both of these aspects. For us today, it is still the Gospel of Christ. But, we have all the Scriptures to use.
- They had fellowship (v. 42). I will come back to this in point 3, but simply put it is the gathering together of God's special people in a way that the world cannot have. They were united in Christ through the Holy Spirit and when they came together they had fellowship.
- They shared a meal (v. 42). In those days they actually observed the Lord's Supper, remembering Jesus' death and what he had done for them. Today, we do this in our larger gatherings once a month. But, in our home groups, having a meal is important. And we follow their example.
- They prayed (v. 42). This is obvious. They prayed, which was essential for them and us. This is a time for young and old to give praises, give thanks, confess sins, and make requests together.

- They met each other's needs (v. 44). They had all things in common. They even **“sold their possessions and belongings, distributing the proceeds to all.”** Their motive in their giving was a “generous heart” (v. 46).
- They met in homes (v. 46). See above.
- They praised God (v. 47). I believe this was a general attitude of praise to the God who gave His Son for them. The fulfillment of all the prophecies had come. The glorious Gospel of the blessed God was theirs in their savior Jesus Christ. There should never a day go by where the Christian doesn't offer up praise to God for the Gospel. We also sing. Whether we have a musician or not, musical instrument or not, we sing.

These verses give us a general picture of some of the things we should be doing in home group. Our home groups give us an opportunity to do so much more than what we do here at the Y in SS or in corporate worship. Let me summarize. We meet in homes, making it very personal. We have a meal. We have time for fellowship. We sing. We share our burdens. We are not segregated by age. All the church, from old to young infants, we are together. We have fathers. We have mothers. We have children. We have siblings. We have natural family relationships that are not age segregated. All of these “parts” are important.

3. What Can you do personally to be a healthy home group member? Consider these applications (some are short).<sup>1</sup> These aren't in any particular order.

- Take Ownership of Your Home Group. What do I mean by this? I recently read an example that I will share. With all of our travels around the world, we have often rented cars. And, I have never gotten an ugly or worn out rental car. When I get behind the wheel, I usually think, “*Wow, this is great. What power. What cleanliness. What a beautiful design or paint job.*” And, before returning it, I don't mind stepping on the gas pedal to take off quickly. I don't question the quality of low-grade gas. I may break harder than normal. When I return it, I don't usually vacuum. The reason I do these things is because it is not my car. But, it is not so with my own car. I change the oil. I buy new tires and rotate them. I vacuum all the dirt and clean all the spills. I listen to the motor and notice when it is not running right. Why? It is mine. The rental car was not. Do you think of your home group as “your group?” Or, do you simply show up because it is something you are supposed to do at church? Is it a precious group of people God has placed in your life for a year? Or, are those in your group simply tolerated for a year and a half? Brothers and sisters, home group must not become a “chore,” something we have to do here at Grace. If this is your feeling, pray. God will change your heart and your feeling toward hg.
- Have realistic expectations. Don't expect too much from you leader or those in your group. Your home group leader will let you down. He may not do something like you think he should. Other members from your group will let you down. Remember, we are sinners, struggling with many of the same things in life.
- Meet outside the home group. I would encourage you to get together this year with those who are in your home group outside the normal meeting (when possible).
- Open Your Home. Whether it is nice or not so nice, big or small, I would encourage you to open your home for home groups. Remember, the early Christians had “*all things in common.*” As difficult as this may be, it will help with pride, keeping you humble. With this said, I would like to remind us also to be respectful in other people's homes. Kids shouldn't jump on the couch or be allowed to run through the house. I know this has been a point of difficulty for

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the applications for this section come from C. J. Mahaney's booklet called *Why Small Groups*.

some. Let's be considerate to the host. Also, help clean. This is simply another way to serve.

- Be Constructive, not destructive in your comments. In some groups there may be those who usually ending up twisting discussions into debates. In Paul's letter to Titus he warns against those who engage in "unprofitable and useless" controversies and arguments (Tit. 3:9). There should always be time for some discussion, but try to keep from unhealthy questions you know will lead you down paths that may not be helpful in the home group setting. Your home group leader will not always know the answers. There is always time for these discussions after.
- Consider your home group as a place to do biblical counseling. In our culture, we tend to leave counseling to the "pastors" or trained professionals. But, this is not particularly biblical. Our home groups should be the place where we take every opportunity to help one another with the difficulties of life. The local church is the place where counseling should happen. And it must begin in our home groups.
- Pray on your way to home group. Make it a habit to pray with your children/spouse before home group, whether in the driveway or car. Ask God to speak to you and your family. Ask God to help your leader and those who attend.
- Consider the discipleship of our children. Even if you don't have small children, you are still a part of their discipleship. We can encourage all our children to take part, in our catechism, in the way we teach, the way we engage them. Let's don't think home group is just for the adults. It is not. It is just as much for them as it is for us (maybe more). Home groups are a place to reinforce what we are teaching in the home. I realize it is difficult for small children to sit. But, it is not impossible with the right training. This may mean that one of the parent's must continually take the disobedient child out of the meeting. And, this mustn't always fall on the mother. We must understand that there will be times when the small children have to be taken out for longer periods. Husbands, don't think your wives must always do this part. Remember, parents with small kids, by the grace of God, this time will pass. For those of you who do not have kids, be patient. Do your best to show grace, remembering when you had small kids. Do your best to also take part in the discipleship of these precious ones.
- Use your gifts. 1 Pet. 4:10-11 says, **"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one**

**who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies--in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.”** If you are a Christian, if you have the Spirit of God dwelling in you, you have a spiritual gift (maybe more). Maybe it is giving, or faith, or mercy. I could go on. Maybe you have talents, like singing, or playing an instrument, that can be used in the group. Use it. The best way to know your gift/s is to serve your brothers and sisters. Every time together, make it your goal to do good to your brothers and sisters.

- Keep our goal in mind. We always want to create an environment where making disciples is normal. It doesn't take a gifted leader to make a great group. It takes you. You must own it. You must pray for your group and invest in it. God is responsible for building his church, and He is using home groups at GBC for this purpose. The world is starving for this kind of fellowship. The “Church” is starving for this kind of fellowship. What an opportunity we have to show the world what true Christian fellowship is in the life of Grace Baptist Church as we create an environment where making disciples is normal!

Expect Great Home Groups this time around.