

SMALL GROUPS

"Why does Cornerstone emphasize that each member must be in small group?"

Because Christ set the example for us to follow

The example of Christ is the command of Christ. There is a strange doctrine blowing through the modern church which views the example of Christ in the gospels as nothing more than a "**description**" of how He lived not a "**prescription**" for how we must live. Paul said, "Follow me as I follow Christ", and Peter said that Christ has laid down the footsteps for us to walk in. We must reject the modern evangelical mindset to reinvent the wheel. Thanks to false teachers like Hybels and Warren, churches today think that they must come up with an "innovative" and "new" way of doing everything – evangelism, preaching, leadership, discipleship, etc.

Jesus Christ, when he came to earth to do the Father's will, could have gathered crowds of thousands and used the model of the modern arena preachers and spoken weekly to thousands, and left it at that. He didn't. Jesus knew that:

1. There are many functions of a **pastor** which he cannot perform in an arena setting.
2. There are many things that must happen in **discipleship** which cannot take place in an arena setting, and
3. There are many responsibilities which church **members** must fulfill toward each other which cannot be fulfilled in an arena setting.

Jesus showed us how to solve those problems by forming a small group of 12 disciples. Jesus spent much time with His disciples in such close fellowship that they could lay their head on His chest, ask him questions and reveal their thoughts, personalities and weaknesses. That simply cannot happen in an arena setting. We too are to spend such time with the men whom we are discipling (Matt. 28:19). He took them out evangelizing (Luke 9). He sat in homes and taught them in a small group atmosphere. They were called together in a small group setting to be held accountable for their evangelistic activities (Luke 10:23).

Because the pastor is responsible to shepherd the flock

"Be diligent to know the state of your flocks (plural!), and attend to your herds" (Prov. 27:23). Shepherding the flock (1 Pet. 5:2) requires discipleship, oversight, accountability and discipline. None of that can happen once a church grows into the hundreds, unless the people are subdivided into smaller accountability groups. Small groups then are essential to the biblical function of a pastor once a church becomes too large for him to "know well the state of his flocks".

Because the brothers are responsible for their brothers

Paul commanded that the Hebrews were to "see to it" that none of their brothers fall short of grace, and that no apostate was allowed to infiltrate the church and poison and defile many (Heb. 12:14-16). You simply cannot know anyone in depth when the only time you see them is when they are sitting across an auditorium listening to a sermon. Oversight, (the kind of oversight spoken of in Hebrews 12), demands that we meet regularly with our brothers (in the same church) in a small church setting. We must have discussions, pray together, ask about each other's marriage, parenting, and watch the other person's emotions and attitudes. Those meetings must take place regularly; therefore small groups must take place regularly.

Because brothers are to love their brothers

Love is action not merely emotion (1 Cor. 13). "But whoever has this world's goods and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart of compassion to him, how does the love of God abide in him?" (1 John 3:17). You cannot "see your brother in need" if you do not have a regular relationship with your brother. Small groups are the model we see in Scripture to know the needs of others and meet those needs. God set men in families in Genesis. The family is the quintessential small group. No human father worth his salt would tolerate the idea of a communal family in which the only interaction you had with your children was in a weekly assembly of hundreds. The genius of the family is the constant and repeated interaction of the family has with each other. The father gets to know his family so well that he can tell by a facial expression how they are doing. When we come to Christ for salvation He sets us in the family of the local church. Once the local church grows larger than an extended family then the local church must be subdivided into smaller units. This allows for accountability, discipleship, and fulfilling the "one anothers" in the NT.

Because you cannot be saved if you do not persistently and willfully love your brother

Those who persistently and willingly absent themselves from the things that take place in small group give evidence that they are not saved. Follow this line of thinking carefully. We are not saved by attending small group. What we are saying is that small group is the place where we fulfill much of the responsibilities we have toward our brother.

Those who are absent from small group have to think,

- How else am I going to fulfill the many responsibilities I have to love my brother?
- How else can I fulfill the other functions of a NT church?
- How else am I going to be disciple?
- How else am I going to get to know my brothers on a regular basis in order to know how to edify them?

What other setting would they propose which has biblical precedent in which to fulfill the accountability, teaching, pastoral oversight, etc? "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. **He who does not love does not know God** for God is love" (1 John 4:7, 8). "We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brothers. He who does not love his brother abides in death" (1 John 3:14).

It is in the local church that you are to love your brother. Loving your brother involves:

- meeting his needs (James 2:15-17)
- encouraging him
- exhorting him
- seeing to it that he does not apostatize
- edifying him
- discipling him
- teaching him
- "be kindly affectionate to one another" (Rom. 12:10)
- "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Rom. 12:15)
- hospitality (Rom. 12:13)
- distributing to the needs of the saints (Rom. 12:13)
- eating with him (1 Cor. 5:11)
- and much more (see the "one anothers" in the NT)

Because the church cannot function as the church without small groups

What is the "Church"? If the church is nothing more than an arena of hundreds or thousands of people sitting and listening to great sermons and singing great worship songs then there is no need for small groups. However, that is not the picture we get from the example of Christ, Paul or from the church epistles. Over and over there are exhortations to love each other, care for each other, confront one another when there is sin, exercise oversight of one another, hold one another accountable, know one another, eat with one another in love feasts, disciple one another, pray with and for one another, visit brothers in jail or sisters who are widowed. This is why we say at Cornerstone, that anyone who habitually absents themselves from the local church small group is necessarily absenting themselves from many of the functions of the local church and thereby giving marks that they are unconverted. They have disconnected themselves from "church" by disconnecting themselves from the many functions of the NT church which can only take place in a local church small group relational atmosphere.

The local church is the body delegated in the NT as the place where we meet with our brothers and get to know them – their personalities, weaknesses (Rom 16:17), strengths and so forth. Once a local church grows past a certain unmanageable number (e.g. when you do not know their names and needs) then small groups become essential. **The small church is simply a small group and has the ability to fulfill all of the commands of the NT church.** When a church has about 40 in attendance on Sunday morning the pastor and the members can know everyone by name (e.g. Rom. 16:3-16). You are able to sit with people at the fellowship meals (1 Cor. 11:17-22). You can see whether they attended or missed the service that Sunday (Luke 15:4). You can know whether they have a financial need, a parenting problem, or are at odds with another church member. You can discuss theology and tell whether they are drifting into apostasy. Church discipline can take place (Matt. 18:15). Once you have about 200 on a Sunday things become very anonymous. *This is dangerous!* In most churches people can come and go without anyone really getting to know them. This is how the wolves infiltrate (Jude 4). Anonymity is too deadly for Cornerstone to tolerate it. We believe in church! We believe in the many essential functions of the local church! Our only other option is to force the local church to limit its growth to no more than can fit into a home (Rom 16:23). We do not believe this is biblical.

By way of illustration: a friend of mine in seminary was the pastor of a Sunday school class of 1,500 people in Dallas. It took him months to begin recognizing some of the faces. After about a year he was informed that one of the deacons had left his wife, married another deacon's wife (who left her husband), and all four people continued to attend the same Sunday school class, and both of the men continued to serve as deacons! This had taken place many months before this pastor even heard about it! If small group attendance and accountability had been in place the whole sordid mess could have been either avoided or cut out of the body. However, the mega church cared more about numbers and "growth" than souls and holiness.