

HOME FELLOWSHIP LEADER'S MANUAL

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*And let us consider one another in order to stir up love
and good works, not forsaking the assembling of our-
selves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting
one another, and so much the more as you see the Day
approaching*

Hebrews 10:24-25 NKJV

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Introduction

THE MINISTRY OF THE HOME FELLOWSHIP LEADER

In the New Testament there are several references to "the church that is in their house" (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2). We Christians are God's household and His church (1 Timothy 3:15). As such, we are having a church meeting whenever we gather together. We don't have to be legally incorporated or in a certain building to gather with the members of God's family.

The Home Fellowship, however, must be guided and directed by a dedicated individual; someone who will give of himself so that others may be ministered to. This giving is manifested in a variety of ways: praying for the meeting, preparing for the study, discussing the Scripture, listening to and praying with those who attend, maintaining order and progress so that the time is worthwhile, setting an example, etc. By serving the people in this way, the home pastor serves the Lord.

This manual on Home Fellowships has been designed for the person who wants to give of his time and energy so that others can "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18). However, we must give God full control of our lives so that He can make us what He wants us to be and equip us as useful instruments in His hands. We pray that God will use the Home Fellowship Leader's Manual to stimulate and to help you in your Christian life and service.

CHAPTER 1

The Need and the Vision

THE NEED

God's Word is life. It contains all of God's plans for each of our lives. His commandments, His promises, His rewards, His instructions are all clearly stated so the sincere believer can walk closely with our Lord. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17 we learn that *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."* They are profitable for doctrine (what is right), reproof (what is not right), for correction (how to get right), and for instruction in righteousness (how to stay right). As wonderful as it is to feast upon the great truths of God's Word, the one commonly expressed need and desire is "to have a close fellowship with a small group I can learn to know and share with". Many feel this void. We do need each other! Jesus is our bond, our unity. It is only through Home Fellowships that we can establish these personal relationships necessary to enable us "to love each other". How wonderful and fulfilling to love someone. But first we must learn to know God's family on a personal basis.

In the book of Acts we see a vibrant, active, anointed church. *"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers . . . So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved."* (Acts 2:42, 46-47). An important part of maturity as a Christian can only be realized through a Home Fellowship by studying His Word, praying and fellowshiping together. A Home Fellowship also helps us obey one of Jesus' commands. Jesus said *"A new commandment I give you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:34-35). It's hard to love someone you don't know. A Home Fellowship can be an ideal environment for people to get to know one another and love one another as Jesus told us to. When we are born again, we become a member of "the family of God". Deep love flows in a family relationship. Christians are brothers and sisters and even more than that, we are "friends" of God. Jesus taught three basic truths: (1) that we *"love one another"* (John 13:34); (2) that you *"keep My commandments"* (John 14:15); and (3) that we live the life of a servant, for . . . *whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave -- just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many"*. (Matthew 20:26-28).

THE VISION

How can we accomplish these goals as set down for us by Jesus? The only "method" worth pursuing in the body of Christ must be by scriptural example. The strength of the early church was: (1) in the pure teaching of God's Word; and (2) in the *home fellowship* of the body of believers. *"And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer . . . [they continued to meet in the temple and in their homes] . . . and the Lord adding to their number day by day those who were being saved."* (Acts 2:42-47, NASB). The Home Fellowship can be an extension of the main church body, just as it was in the early church. Our method is to follow the leading of the apostles and the early church.

Home Fellowships have three goals:

1. The Home Fellowship allows time to **share the Word together** and discuss its meaning and application to our lives. Those who have found the secret of receiving God's anointing on their life have confirmed it to be simply knowing and obeying God's Word as it applies to their lives. Solomon once said, *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or whether evil."* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). Jesus said, *"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My Word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."* (John 14:23). To obey God, we must not only be taught, but we must apply the Word to our personal lives (home fellowship sharing) and *obey* the commandments. James tells us, *"But be doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."* (James 1:22). Again, Jesus said, *"More than that, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it!"* (Luke 11:28).

2. To provide an environment where believers can **fellowship in a supportive atmosphere**, which will enable us to disciple one another in personal growth --- *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit"* (Matthew 28:19); encouraging others to love Jesus more through obedience and servant hood --- *"And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works"* (Hebrews 10:24); equipping each other to teach someone new about the glorious gospel of truth and freedom --- *" . . . for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ"* (Ephesians 4:12).

3. To enjoy **worshiping together** through songs of praise and worship, and breaking of bread (communion). This can be either a formal communion, or a simple sharing of an occasional snack or meal together. Home fellowships help us to know each other better; love each other more; apply God's Word to our lives; develop biblical priorities in our lifestyles. In short, we believers can learn to

increase our commitment to Jesus, our commitment to the body of Christ, and our commitment to the work of Christ in our world. We must be the "people" of God before we can ever do the "work" of God. Home fellowship groups develop and disciple us in all these areas.

LEARNING TO LOVE ONE ANOTHER

We say we love one another --- and we do in a limited way. Jesus taught us a new meaning of love when He said, *"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you"*. (John 15:12-14). How can we love each other as Jesus loves us? Think of someone you have really come to love. The first requisite to loving is to know that person. It's not enough to know "of" them. We must become close to that person by: (1) spending time together; (2) communicating heart to heart; (3) establishing a trust relationship through sharing and burden bearing; and finally, (4) making a commitment of our lives together. Only Christians have the capacity for doing these things. The world has no basis, no foundation to build these relationships upon. In short, they have not experienced the miracle of Jesus' redeeming love. Not so with Christians. We have Jesus, the foundation of love, trust, and unity. How blessed we are!

CHAPTER 2

The Scriptural View of a Shepherd

WHAT IS A SHEPHERD?

Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep"*. (John 10:11). The words shepherd and pastor are used interchangeably. Jesus differentiates between the good shepherd and the bad shepherd, or "hireling". One is willing to lay down his life to protect the flock (God's people), while the other is quick to run when trouble or problems come, and uses the flock to his own advantage. Jesus then, as in all things, is ultimately our only safe example to follow.

The Bible paints some of its most beautiful pictures of human character in describing a shepherd. Psalm 23 is the classic picture of the Good Shepherd. A good shepherd (1) provides everything his people need (not want), vs. 1; (2) he puts the heart and mind at rest (in Him), vs. 2; (3) he heals them and he shows them how to honor him, vs. 3; (4) he gives peace in place of fear and protects them against harm (wrong doctrine) as he shows them, step by step, how to walk with him in faith, vs. 4; (5) he feeds them his delicious words of life and joy and happiness --- all in the midst of great trial! He makes them his guests by providing all their needs and he makes his burdens (demands) so light they are overjoyed in their trust in him, vs.5; (6) his plan for his people is only goodness, and he showers them with kindness all of their days on earth, and remains by their side for eternity! vs. 6.

JESUS' TEACHINGS

A true shepherd is one who truly loves God's people. Our ministry is first to God's people and then to the world. An elder, pastor or shepherd, all interchangeably used because of their shepherding functions, is a person of deep love for God's people. He loves his people with unselfish love. But how much love is "unselfish" love?

"This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you." (John 15:12-14)

That is what He calls each one of us to do --- to love our Home Fellowship friends (in Christ) as much as that --- to be willing to die to help them! Many people think that laying down their life is like the scene in the World War II movie where the hero dives on the hand grenade and saves his companions from certain death. That's great, but the possibility of us having a similar opportunity to do that for our fellow believers is not very likely. A more accurate picture of what Jesus meant was that love involves action --- it is not just a warm feeling. The action that love takes in service to others requires laying down our life (our

desires, our plans) and lifting up and serving the needs of others. Love will cost us. It's going to cost us time. It's going to cost us sleep. It's going to cost us resources. That's what we're called to do by the power of His Holy Spirit.

GOD'S PLAN

God's plan for us so often runs cross-grained to the world. He puts more emphasis on giving rather than receiving, on serving one another than on being served, on submitting to others rather than demanding our rights. Although many in the world equate "leadership" with a driving, assertive, forceful personality, Jesus would have us take our lead from Him --- the True Shepherd --- and follow His example.

Jesus said, *"I am the good shepherd; and I know My sheep, and am known by My own."* (John 10:14). As was mentioned earlier, it's very difficult to love someone that you don't know. It's even more difficult to know someone you never spent any time with. As a shepherd, we must spend time with God's people to KNOW them. That's what Home Fellowships are all about. Fellowshiping together, encouraging each other, eating together, and bearing one another's burdens through caring, serving, and prayer. Fellowship equips us, through one another, for living Jesus' life of love.

"Now may the God of peace . . . make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen."
(Hebrews 13:20-21)

THE SHEPHERD'S REWARDS

The world is full of people who want to be loved, desiring for someone to really care for them. We must develop a great compassion for the brethren.

"And Jesus, when He came out, saw a great multitude and was moved with compassion for them, because they were like sheep not having a shepherd. So He began to teach them many things."
(Mark 6:34)

Peter urges us:

"The elders who are among you I exhort . . . Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." (1 Peter 5:1-4)

Recognizing that we oversee God's flock and not *our* flock, we serve them knowing that we are accountable to Him. What a privilege that we have this opportunity and the freedom to truly share Jesus' love with our "church-in-the-

home". *"And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."* (Galatians 6:9).

CAUTIONS TO THOSE WHO WOULD BE SHEPHERDS

James talked about the responsibilities of overseeing God's flock. He wrote, *"My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment"*. (James 3:1). It's obviously not something to be undertaken lightly, but with much prayer. We are teaching and ministering to God's people. What an awesome responsibility. We are representing God to His people that come to the fellowship.

In the book of Exodus, Moses was leading the people through the desert and they ran out of water. God told Moses to go and strike the rock, and it brought forth water for the people. Later, they ran out of water again, and God told Moses that this time if he would only speak to the rock, the water would flow forth. Well, Moses was upset with the people complaining and harassing him, so he yelled at them, hit the rock and the water came out again, just like last time. But it wasn't just like last time. God had told Moses to talk to the rock, not strike it. God told Moses that because he had misrepresented God to the people that he would not be allowed to lead them into the Promised Land. What a price he had to pay for misrepresenting God.

What do we learn from this passage? Do not misrepresent God. He does not take it lightly. The people in the Home Fellowship are His flock --- not ours. He will not tolerate them being abused or mistreated.

To care for someone we must maintain a certain protective spirit. Sheep have wandered away when they thought they saw a greener pasture over the hill. A practical example of showing that care is to get the phone numbers from the people attending the fellowship, so that if you don't see someone for a while you can call them to see if everything is okay. This kind of follow-up, without a pressure to attend --- "Where've you been, Joe?!!" is another way we let people know that we care.

SOME IMPURE SHEPHERDS

"Son of man. prophecy against the shepherds of Israel, prophecy and say to them, Thus says the Lord GOD to the shepherds. Woe to the shepherds of Israel who feed themselves!" Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?" (Ezekiel 34:2)

Israel's pastors were woefully selfish. They used the people instead of serving them. In order to be a pure shepherd, one must maintain a pure heart of love for the people.

THINGS A SHEPHERD IS NOT

1. He is not someone with an unquenchable need to talk and always be "teaching" someone. *"A fool vents all his feelings, but a wise man holds them back."* (Proverbs 29:11).

2. A shepherd does not try to lift himself up. He would rather see others lifted up and honored. A true shepherd is perfectly happy if he is never recognized or honored. *"For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."* (Luke 14:11).

3. A shepherd is not a "professional" clergyman, separated from the "lay people". The Bible clearly makes no such distinction. Evangelical Christians believe in the "priesthood of the believers". All true believers living out the Word are ministers. Some are called to different tasks and given certain gifts, but all are ministers. The Bible does not speak in the New Testament of "layman". Only men honoring themselves are thus misled.

4. A shepherd does not draw people after himself to gain a personal following.

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit had made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:28-30).

There are some groups who have overemphasized the role of a shepherd. They have distorted the truth to attract a following. Often their followers are radically loyal --- to the point of not purchasing anything without their "shepherds" permission. Beware of such false doctrines that they may not spring up among us.

SOME QUALIFICATIONS FOR A SHEPHERD

"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop [pastor], he desires a good work. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil. Likewise deacons must be reverent, not

double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy for money, holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience. But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless. Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things. Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus." (1 Timothy 3:1-13)

Here the virtues of the godly man are identified. We could never measure up on our own, but Christ in us can do it all through us --- not ourselves, but of Him, through the power of His Holy Spirit. Paul wrote to the Philippians: *"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."* (Philippians 4:13).

SOME RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SHEPHERD

1. "To feed the flock."

"The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away." (1 Peter 5:1-4).

"Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves." (Acts 20:28-30).

2. "To perfect the saints."

"And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." (Ephesians 4:11-13).

Not just teaching, but total involvement with one another. Caring for God's people as a shepherd does his sheep, leading and teaching them in the ways of God. Encouraging them to allow themselves to be used by God in the work of the ministry.

3. "To protect the sheep from imposters."

"Holding fast the word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict." (Titus 1:9).

"Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." (Romans 16:17-18).

4. "To pray for the people."

"For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to [pray for you], and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding." (Colossians 1:9).

"Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to [pray for you]; but I will teach you the good and the right way." (1 Samuel 12:23).

Possible areas for prayer for the people are: (1) their growth in Christ, (b) the people's needs, (c) their protection, (d) for their presence and involvement at the fellowship.

CONCLUSION

A shepherd is one who really cares and loves God's people. And specifically, the people attending the Home Fellowship. God wants to love them through us!.

CHAPTER 3

The Idea of Supportive Fellowships

On the back of every Calvary Chapel bulletin the following words are printed: "Love is the greatest virtue and demonstration of the reality of Jesus Christ and the fullness of His Spirit in our lives. We endeavor to show a Christ-like love toward all men. Love should be exhibited in our lives by our words as well as our actions".

Real love and real fellowship go hand in hand. One is dependent upon the other. Let's look at what the Bible teaches about love and fellowship, then we can explore practical ways to experience this love --- what we call "supportive fellowship".

LOVE AND FELLOWSHIP

Love is the evidence of being a disciple of Jesus. We may convince people that we are believers in Jesus, but there is no way we can claim to be His disciples without love.

Jesus said, *"All will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."* (John 13:35).

Many are satisfied with themselves because they are serving God and even being used by God to do great things. In 1 Corinthians 13 we see the relationship between love and service. *"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I have become a sounding brass or clanging symbol."* No one likes the sound of an alarm bell clanging and clanging! Imagine someone crashing a symbol next to your head for a half hour. It would not draw men to Jesus. *"Though I have the gift of prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing."* Men may think that they are really great and even have others thinking so, too. *"Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and . . . give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing."* We often hear that we gain great heavenly rewards by giving service, but without love it is not so. Look over the descriptions of service that are included here. If we met someone who only had a few of these, we would probably be amazed. All the speaking gifts are covered; so are the gifts of power (have you ever even heard of a saint that moved a mountain?). Notice that all the knowledge gifts are included as well as giving of ourselves in total sacrifice. As much as we look up to these things, we must realize that without love, they register zero to God. God's love is demonstrated when we love every person we encounter --- not just those we are attracted to or have a lot in common with. Jesus said, *"If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love (agapao) those who love them."* (Luke 6:32)

Have you been in fellowships where it always seemed that there was some oddball in the group that goofed things up? Would you pray, "God, if only this person wasn't here to cry all the time, or argue all the time (or whatever), we would have great fellowship."? But God's Word tells us that sinners can have a mutual admiration society with selected people. But we, as Christians, should not. We can show a special kind of supernatural love when we learn to love the *unlovely*.

Since God loves us in a practical way, we need to love each other this way.

"This is how we know what love is; Jesus Christ laid down His life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth." (1 John 3:16-18, NIV).

We can observe some real love when it starts to affect a man's pocketbook! We cannot help everyone in need, but we can help those that God sends our way with a real need. Fellowship means sharing "life". We share life with God, and we share life with one another (1 John 1:3). This fellowship comes as we walk in the light (1 John 1:7). Walking in the light means loving our brother (1 John 2:9-10), as Jesus has commanded us. Fellowship is "caring" for each other. Being a disciple of Christ means giving ourselves in sacrificial, practical love, to others. This is Jesus' way to true Christian fellowship, without this love we cannot be true disciples and we cannot have real biblical fellowship.

LOVE ON A PRACTICAL LEVEL

How does this loving fellowship function? What are some practical ways we can do it? Hebrews 10:24, (NIV) states, *"Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds."* Our motivation when we are with the brethren should not be just "What am I getting out of this? I'll keep to myself, thank you". Rather, we should be finding ways to encourage and help each other to find fresh love for one another and trust Jesus.

"Dear brothers, if a Christian is overcome by some sin, you who are godly should gently and humbly help him back onto the right path, remembering that next-time, it might be one of you who is in the wrong. Share each other's troubles and so obey our Lord's commands. If anyone thinks he is too great to stoop for this, he is fooling himself." (Galatians 6:1-3)

How many times have we seen a brother who has stumbled? The enemy has gotten to him and he has fallen into sin. We Christians see him in this wounded state and what do we do? Do we have compassion on him and bring him in for help? No we usually finish him off with proud condemnation, heaping guilt upon him. Oh, how we need to lovingly and humbly restore those who are in such

trouble! This is what bearing one another's burdens really means. Hebrews 3:13 says, *"Exhort one another daily . . . lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin."* Sin is deceptive.

Often we are blind to areas of unfaithfulness in our own lives. One protection against a callused conscience, against spiritual blind spots is the daily encouragement of other believers. Such encouragement can be effective only when it come from people who see me frequently enough to know me well, and who love me enough to correct me in the spirit of gentleness. James 5:16 says, *"Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed."* We need to be able to share the burdens that we bear because of our shortcomings. Besides confessing to God, we sometimes need to confess to one another so that they can have the privilege of sharing our problems and praying for us. This openness and honesty brings powerful results in prayer and healing. We must be careful not to share details that can stumble a fellow believer. All they really need to know is what to pray for, not the tabloid version. Romans 12:15 says, *"Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep."* As we draw into close loving communion with our brethren, we break away from formal sympathy so that we have real hearts of compassion to share someone's joys and sorrows. We all need to do this for others, as well as have them return this love and confidence.

All of these ways of helping and supporting one another. Every part of the body of Christ needs the other parts (see 1 Corinthians 12:21-26). This supporting of each other is what God wants us to do. This is what we all need to do. This is what the Lord commands us to do. Are we doing it? How critical, to all in our great body of believers, that we meet in Home Fellowships for sharing and supporting.

Where do we do this? --- In small groups.

This is the way the early church functioned. They shared different aspects of their Christian life: Acts 2:42 --- teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, prayer. They also had different ways of coming together: Acts 2:46 --- meeting in the temple (large group) and meeting in their homes (small groups).

If your Home Fellowship is small (less than 8 people) you can have sharing and prayer with the whole group at once. But if you have a group of 20 people, you will need to have small supportive groups within the larger group, if you are to allow people to open up to share burdens and support each other. Each person has to have some time to speak and/or pray. If you have 40 minutes with 20 people, then each person has 2 minutes each to do all their sharing and praying. But if you divide that group into 5 groups of 4 people, then each person will have 10 minutes to share and pray. A meaningful difference!

SUMMARY

We need to break away from the current common situation where we see Christian brethren once a week in church, say "hello" and "good bye", and that's it for fellowship. No wonder we see so many Christians around us who are hurting and falling! We need God's Word to change our lives and we need to get involved in each other's lives if we are to have true Christian love and fellowship. May God use us, and our home groups, to bring this to pass!

The One Another's

REFERENCE	STATEMENT
Romans 12:10	Be devoted to one another. Give preference to one another
Romans 12:16	Be of the same mind toward one another
Romans 13:8	Love one another
Romans 14:13	Let us not judge one another
Romans 14:19	Pursue that which makes for peace and building up one another
Romans 15:5	Be of the same mind with one another
Romans 15:7	Accept one another
Romans 15:14	Admonish one another
1 Corinthians 12:25	Care for one another
Galatians 5:13	Serve one another
Galatians 6:2	Bear one another's burdens
Ephesians 4:1-2	Insert DATA for row 13, column 2
Ephesians 4:32	Be kind to one another
Ephesians 5:19	Speak to one another in psalms and hymns
Ephesians 5:21	Be subject to one another
Colossians 3:9	Do not lie to one another
Colossians 3:12-13	Bear with one another - Forgive each other
Colossians 3:16	Teach and admonish one another
1 Thessalonians 3:12	Increase and abound in love for one another
1 Thessalonians 4:18	Comfort one another
Hebrews 3:13	Encourage one another
Hebrews 10:23-25	Stimulate one another to love and good deeds
James 4:11	Do not speak against one another
James 5:9	Do not complain against one another
James 5:16	Pray for one another
1 Peter 1:22	Love one another
1 Peter 4:9	Be hospitable to one another
1 Peter 5:5	Clothe yourself with humility toward one another
1 John 3:11	Love one another
1 John 3:23	Love one another
1 John 4:7	Love one another

CHAPTER 4

Conducting a Home Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

As we have discussed before, the early church established the pattern of the "church-in-the-home" concept. They held both home fellowships and church worship for the corporate body of believers. The synagogue (church building) was used for the teaching sessions.

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers. Then fear came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles. Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." (Acts 2:42-47)

Our thinking in modern Christianity is often oriented to the "church building" rather than the "church" (believers). Christians began erecting church buildings about 200 A.D. The concept of a church building implies: (1) permanence and staying --- while Jesus said, "go"; (2) let the lost come to the church (building) to be saved --- while Jesus says, "go seek the lost"; (3) communication is one way -- preacher to people --- rather than a combination of: (a) teaching and learning; (b) application to our lives by sharing, fellowship, and doing His will.

There is a certain level of koinonia (fellowship) we can experience in corporate church worship and Bible study. However, homes are an ideal place, as stated previously, to have the opportunity to love one another, encourage and support others, and to be trained in servant hood. At the same time we will find ourselves being loved, encouraged, and supported, as well as being accountable to others. *"But He said, 'More that that, blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it [put it into practice]!" (Luke 11:28).* The second half of the gospel is doing --- first hearing, then doing. The Home Fellowship gives the opportunity to explore and apply the principles being taught when the whole body is gathered together.

HOME FELLOWSHIP GOALS

The book of Acts is our example: (1) to study and get a good grasp upon God's precious Word through faithful attention to sound teaching; (2) to meet together each week for Christian fellowship and sharing of one another's burdens, *"Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."* (Galatians 6:2); (3) to

discuss and apply His Word to our lives, *"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."* (2 Timothy 3:16). In short, then, our goal is to expand the Bible teaching and preaching ministry into the lives of every believer, so that God may "stir up" the marvelous gifts in His "body" --- the church. Together, we learn to *"love one another"* (1 John 3:11) and *"serve one another"* (Galatians 5:13) in God's great plan to help us grow in the stature and nurture of the love and humility of Jesus.

THE HOME FELLOWSHIP CONCEPT

As we have looked into God's plan for the "church", we can easily see that His number-one priority is for us to be disciples of Jesus. Discipleship is more than receiving Christ. It is more than faithful church attendance. It is even more than sharing the gospel with others. Even combined, these activities fall short of Jesus' goal of discipleship. *"Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, If you abide in My Word, you are My disciples indeed."* (John 14:15). In short, a true disciple is one who obeys and abides in Jesus' Word, even as he has been taught. Some seem to feel that because salvation is free, any reference to obedience is not of grace, but of the law. Nothing could be farther from the truth. The concept of the application of God's Word to our everyday life is given constant emphasis by Jesus. He said,

"But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great." (Luke 6:49)

So the concept is to carefully listen to the teaching of God's Word, then apply it to our lives through discussion and close fellowship. A broad spectrum of believers is served by Home Fellowships. There are those that are beginning to walk the Christian life who need to grow and share in a supportive fellowship. There are those who are more mature in Jesus who, besides desiring to continue their growth in the knowledge of the Lord, are also seeking opportunities to apply God's instructions and serve the body. The Home Fellowship is for Christians of all ages and in any stage of Christian experience. Each will grow at his or her own pace in the following: (1) applying God's Word; (2) finding God's will through a living, progressing faith; (3) learning to love God, others, and ourselves by sharing burdens and joys; (4) experiencing the thrill and joy of answered prayer; (5) in discovering new, practical truths from the Bible for their personal life; and (6) effectively helping others to understand how to trust Jesus as Lord and Savior. Why the Bible study and personal application emphasis? Some Home Fellowships have overemphasized home worship and social fellowship without Bible study application. While this concept fills a definite need in Christian lives, its shortfall is that it is based more upon emotional needs and social desire than upon the biblical principles of growth through the study and application of God's Word. God's Word is spiritual food. Without a steady diet of it, we become spiritually malnourished.

The Home Fellowships concept is to meet these needs to share, have fellowship, learn to "love one another" worship and also to know and apply God's guidance to our lives. If the Word is not kept central, we easily stray from God's Word to man's ideas and emotions. Singing we need; worship we need; sharing we need; and applying God's Word we need, as we grasp His great principles that will give us "living energy" for a healthy Christian life. Outreach evangelism will then become a functional part of every believer's life. It is the daily revival and daily renewal that Jesus wants. It is a natural outflow, like an artesian well, that God is wanting us to have, through practical application of Jesus' commands. Jesus said, *"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water."* (John 7:38) One way to lead the Bible study portion of a Home Fellowship is to follow one's pastor through a particular book of scripture that he is systematically teaching. This accomplishes several things:

1. Each person knows in advance the portion of Scripture being studied that week and can study in advance of the meeting.
2. It ensures a steady diet of God's Word in the Home Fellowship. It is based on a weekly survey of the Bible, not on a haphazard approach.
3. It gets people to review and better learn the Bible teaching they hear.
4. It gets the Bible into the Home Fellowship without having one person dominate the meeting.
5. It teaches the group to apply and dig into the Word for themselves rather than depending on someone to do it all for them.
6. Book by book study has some of the best long-term benefits because it gets people to know and feel comfortable with the whole Bible.
7. Not every Home Fellowship leader must have the gift of teaching; he only has to direct the group discussion.
8. Your pastor does the hard ground work of research and study (building a skeleton) while the Home Fellowship concentrates on personal application in specific areas of our lives (putting the meat on the bones).
9. Because the Bible is being personalized and people are sharing how it applies to them, this naturally flows into supportive ministering to one another and prayer.
10. This plan gives the Home Fellowship leaders on-the-job training in taking people through the Bible.

Another alternative would be to teach through a book with time allowed for discussion of the passage with emphasis on the application to our lives. This requires more time of the leader for preparation, research and study.

The Home Fellowship leader serves as a shepherd to the group. Everyone will prepare for the Bible study portion of the fellowship. The leader will not be a preacher or even a teacher, per se, but rather a facilitator. He will be sensitive to the Word, the believer's needs, and to the time constraints of the meeting. The leader will make music and refreshment arrangements and seek out the special

gifts of the group. After a while, the group will function as a body, always seeking to please and serve one another.

BEGINNING OUR HOME FELLOWSHIP GROUP

THE HEART FOR GOD

The first thing necessary to pastor a Home Fellowship is a heart for God. Nothing can take the place of the Home Fellowship pastor's desire for serving God; a true commitment to living out Jesus' commands; a total trust in the Word of God; a servant's attitude and a desire to disciple and build Jesus' love into the lives of others.

A "TIME" SPAN COMMITMENT BY EVERYONE (A SUGGESTION)

At the very first meeting, every believer could be encouraged to express their commitment to the group for some period of time (maybe 6 months to a year). This will help all to give top priority to the group fellowship in our busy time schedules. Some suggest a duration of only 6, 8 or 12 weeks, but it takes time to get to know people. Some have no time commitment at all. The choice is up to you.

WHERE TO MEET

As discussed earlier, the early church met in homes. The home is the best place to meet. Some groups grow so rapidly this seems impractical before too long. However, the relaxed atmosphere of a home (a Christian home) encourages sharing and fellowship. If the group gets too large, a new fellowship can be formed by splitting the group. This way we multiply by dividing.

In most cases, the Home Fellowship leader (and spouse) also serve as hosts, conducting the fellowship in their home. If the meetings are not held in the leader's home, the host family must be made aware of the cost and commitment needed to ensure a positive environment for the fellowship group. It is most important that the fellowship be hosted by a couple (husband and wife) who are not only committed to the Lord but who are in agreement about opening their home on a weekly basis.

Rotation between the homes of different fellowship believers is sometimes desirable. Some rotate every six weeks --- some longer, some for shorter periods. Pray about it together. There is much to be said about meeting in the same place all the time, because it gives a consistency to the group that people can count on. Also, people who don't attend for a while are able to rejoin the group without difficulty.

WHAT HOURS ARE BEST TO MEET?

Is there really a best time to meet? Most groups meet for two hours. The most common seems to be 7:30 - 9:30 p.m. Others meet from 7 - 9 p.m., and others 8 - 10 p.m. The group should pray and agree about the time and length of the meeting. Two hours allows time for in-depth Bible study, sharing, worship in prayer and song, and refreshments.

MUSIC AND WORSHIP

Christians love to sing. Singing is supplemental, however, and should not regularly take precedence over Bible discussion time. The pastor should arrange for a regular worship leader if at all possible. This is an important position because worship is important. There's a difference between someone who can play music and sing and someone who leads worship. What's the difference? --- A servant's heart. A worship leader is one whose desire is to bless the fellowship through their talents (not just bring attention to themselves), and help bring the group into an attitude of worship as well as singing on key. Keep in mind that people don't become worship leaders overnight. Be in prayer for your worship leader. Encourage them. Be patient.

WHO WILL BE IN THE FELLOWSHIP?

The Home Fellowship leader and his helpers (spouse, worship leaders) should be in prayer often, that God would show them the right persons to invite. The Home Fellowship should be open to all believers who love Jesus and want to learn God's Word. Believers should be gathered in a fellowship as close to their home as possible. Ideally, they should be believers who really want to grow in their faith in Jesus. This does not exclude the unsaved, but they should be carefully considered and limited in number at any given time. This group is basically for the discipline of believers by "one another". It becomes a learning process of how "to love one another", as Jesus commanded, and how to apply God's Word directly to our lives each day.

SELECTIVE GROUPINGS

Home fellowships can be comprised of any combination of age groups; married only; singles only; senior citizens only (55 and over); Spanish speaking; youth only, etc. The leader should choose his group according to God's leading. If the group is selective, as mentioned above, the leader should make this clear to everyone involved. There's a lot to be said, though, for those fellowships that would keep themselves open to all adults, for example. The younger can learn much from older believers. Older believers can catch the renewed enthusiasm from new believers. Singles can learn from married people. Married people can gain appreciation for and be reminded of what it means to be single. Widows, widowers, single parents, married, singles, older adults, younger adults, new believers, and mature believers all have gifts and insights to share that each of us need the benefit of, regardless of the category we are in.

THE HOME FELLOWSHIP FORMAT

Remembering the priorities and purposes of our Home Fellowship will help us to establish our most effective format, or time schedule. Always starting right "on time" will prevent people from drifting in late. People will soon know when you start --- they will come almost exactly as your opening sessions establish 7:30, 7:40 or 7:45. Promptness is a part of our Christian discipline, which helps everyone. Try especially hard, with God's help, to start on time. Assuming a 7:30 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. fellowship time, the following is a suggested time plan:

- 7:30 - Open with prayer and announcements
- 7:35 - Singing-praise
- 8:00 - Discussion and application time
- 8:50 - Sharing and praying for one another in small groups (2-5 persons in prayer together)
- 9:30 - Light refreshments and departing for home

Please keep in mind that these are not cast in concrete. It is a sample schedule. You may move some of the aspects around to different time slots. You may allow more time for an activity than is listed here. The important thing is starting with a game plan. The Holy Spirit may modify your plan as you go along, but you need an idea of how the time will flow once you start.

OPENING PRAYER

Opening prayer should concentrate on entreating God for revelation, divine light, and application of the Word to our daily lives. A focus for the opening prayer might be that we would be encouraged, enriched and challenged as we allow God to move in our hearts during the meeting. Praying can be done by an assigned person, or it can be opened up for various people to pray with an assigned person to close. Sometimes it is good to have a time of silence where each person can quiet his heart and deal with the different concerns of that day that would distract his mind. Occasionally, an individual may immediately bring up a pressing prayer request. It may be best to pray about it right then. The individual will more likely be at peace during the remainder of the study.

SINGING AND PRAISE

In addition to being an act of obedience, a time of song and worship can do much to prepare our hearts and minds to receive from God's Word. Try to use simple chorus songs that people can quickly pick up and sing along with. Attention should be focused on "singing to the Lord". Don't be afraid to cut it off on time. You won't quench the Spirit, but you will leave people alert and expectant as you get into the Word. Some find it good to stand and/or clap on the first song or two so that people don't get mentally sluggish from sitting too long.

THE STUDY OF GOD'S WORD

We have already discussed several ways to lead a study of God's Word and there are lots more. Much depends on the composition, maturity, and number of people who attend. It is difficult to maintain a small group's attention when one person does all the speaking. It can be done, but it's not easy. Therefore, for groups of 20 or fewer people, an interactive study will often hold the attention of a group better and they will get more out of the exchange. The application of God's Word to our lives should be continually emphasized. The home leader should try to limit himself to 5 to 10 minutes if he decides to expound on a particular point. Don't allow books, tapes, doctrinal discussions and trivia to take the place of God's Word. They are good only if they help you get into the Bible.

THE SHARING AND CARING TIME

This is a time when we ask for prayer by our loving brethren and rejoice over answered prayer from the week before. How we applied God's Word to our life this week and what God has done in our lives will become the most exciting part of your sharing. Accept the other person as someone that God loves. Don't confess anyone else's sins and problems but your own! (Ezekiel 18:20). Practice being a good, loving listener! Share past victories in that area and relevant Scriptures. Don't waste time on unimportant topics; you will need the time to pray.

When you have your prayer time, try to make sure everyone gets a chance to pray and that everyone is prayed for. You might: (1) go around the circle and have each person pray for the person next to him; (2) have each person pray for the need that he brought out; (3) stop and pray for each need right after it is shared; (4) have a time of open prayer and ask one person to close when God directs.

A book of prayer requests and answers might be made up for the group, or better yet, each person can keep track of prayer requests shared with them on sheets you provide. Praying for each other during the week is important and might be helped by; (1) Praying for that person you paired up with; (2) using the list that you wrote of prayer requests to pray for those needs during the week; (3) having a phone list to call each other when needs come up or get answered, etc.

CLOSING WITH LIGHT REFRESHMENTS

This is optional and up to the preference of the group. Do not allow the hostess to feel responsible to provide this every week. Consider rotating the responsibility for providing refreshments. You could rotate and have a sign-up sheet, as long as people do not feel pressured or in competition about the refreshments.

Remember to keep your time priorities! Families have children, baby-sitters to take home, and work the next day. A well-disciplined time structure will give a home pastor a happier fellowship. Try hard. Get started right. Starting late or singing too long will cut into valuable time later in the meeting or make it run too late. Also, God is not moved so much by long prayers, but by sincere, heartfelt, compassionate ones.

These are just some ideas to help you get started. You may decide to use some of them and not others. The Lord may give you some better ideas. Stay flexible to the leading of the Holy Spirit, but make sure you cover those basic things that the fellowship is founded on --- the Word and sharing God's love.

Here are some extra tips that will help you in your Home Fellowship:

1. Work together with the host/hostess of your fellowship to ensure that there are a minimum of distractions (i.e., noise, children, excessive heat, improper lighting, etc.).
2. Be diligent to keep your time priorities week by week. Try to start on time with prayer and either singing or giving testimonies. Starting late actually encourages the people to keep coming late every week. On the other hand, be careful to use the time wisely so that you will be able to finish when people need to leave (i.e., long, drawn-out prayer requests can use up much valuable group time).
3. Do what you can to make people feel comfortable and involved by sitting in a circle. Avoid a pupil/teacher seating arrangement because it will discourage sharing and make everything dependent upon you.
4. Be aware that many people have trouble sharing even to a group of ten or more people. Prayfully consider ways that you can break the group into smaller groups of five or less people so that everyone can share, pray and be prayed for.
5. Pray for the people in your group regularly during the week. Especially pray that God will make you sensitive to their individual needs as well as the needs of the group as a whole. Always pray with an open ear and a flexible heart in case the Lord points to an area needing change!
6. Instill in your people a vision for the great potential of a home group. Help them to focus on the long-term benefits of going through the Bible. Point them toward the richness of learning to love one another by such things as a phone list that people could use for prayer and sharing. Finally, open their eyes to the outreach they could have to non-Christians through potluck dinners, outings and the like, or volunteering as a group to start or assist a ministry to the body at your church.
7. Be sensitive to the possibility that God may bring you into a special relationship with some person or persons. The Lord may have you disciple and train them to do that you are doing and, perhaps, start a Home Fellowship of their own.

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