

APOSTOLIC SMALL GROUP MINISTRY — ANTIOCH NORTH

Purpose ≈> Pattern ≈> Preparation ≈> Participation

Acts 2:42 And they **continued stedfastly** in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers...

...**46** And they, **continuing daily** with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, **47** Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

KJV

*[Continued stedfastly/Continuing: STRONGS [4342] proskartereō: to continue, be earnest towards, to be constantly diligent, to adhere to, to be **devoted** or **constant**.]*

AMPLIFIED BIBLE - Acts 2:42 They were continually and faithfully devoting themselves to the instruction of the apostles, and to fellowship, to eating meals together and to prayers.

...**46** Day after day they met in the temple [area] continuing with one mind, and breaking bread in various private homes. They were eating their meals together with joy and generous hearts, **47** praising God continually, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord kept adding to their number daily those who were being saved.

PREAMBLE

The Lord adds to what He builds. (Ephesians 2:19-22, Matthew 16:18). Solomon said in Psalm 127:1 "Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it...". Men will only to attempt to build when Jesus isn't involved. We are to be co-laborers WITH Christ as He uses us in His building project. He should therefore direct us in how His house is built.

PURPOSE OF DOING SMALL GROUPS

○ To properly care for the local 'Church Body'

- Feed (*Teach*)
- Equip (*Supply*)
- Prepare (*Train & Assemble*)
- Send (*Commission & Assign*)

○ To follow the Apostolic principles and actions described in scripture

- The early church **continued** with meeting in a public facility and in house gatherings. The gatherings included prayers, apostolic teaching, fellowship and sharing meals together.
- This is the **ONLY** Apostolic church model described in scripture.
- We are careful to distinguish what is "described" in scripture versus what is "prescribed." The New Testament never prescribes (or commands) believers to meet in homes, but it does describe that believers met in homes. Conversely, scripture doesn't prescribe gathering in a building. The Bible does, however, prescribe gathering together!

Hebrews 10:25 KJV “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.”

ERV We must not quit meeting together, as some are doing. No, we need to keep on encouraging each other. This becomes more and more important as you see the Day getting closer. — **Hebrews 10:25**

- We see from various verses in the Book of Acts (Acts 2:2 & 46; **5:42**; 12:12) and in the Epistles (Romans 16:1; 16:3-5; 16:14&15, 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 1:2) that houses became the primary place for the gathering of believers as the church spread beyond Jerusalem.
- As far as we can tell from history, believers didn't gather in a 'church building' during the 1st or 2nd centuries. There is 3rd century archeological evidence dating back to A.D. 240 that a church group located in Dura-Europos, Syria converted a private house into a “house-church” styled building for worship gatherings. They converted one room inside into a baptistery room. Obviously, Constantine's Edict of Milan of February 313 A.D. was one of the major events that led to churches primarily holding meetings in buildings. However, history shows that the edict allowed for confiscated property that was previously Christian owned be returned. We know the first century methods reflected the Apostolic and biblical structure Christ and the apostles established.

○ To reflect THE church structure that the Lord added to daily

- Just because you use a house for gathering, doesn't make it or you Apostolic. We can have a crowd in any type of edifice. We can have a large or small crowd. There are things that must take place in the house that makes it Apostolic.
- While the gospel was primarily preached [*proclaimed*] in public (Acts 8:4; 16:13), in the temple (Acts 4:1-2) and in the synagogues (Acts 13:14, 15, 42, 43), homes were also instrumental in the preaching the gospel (Acts **5:42**; 10:44; 16:15 & 32).
- People receiving the Holy Ghost inside a home was how God birthed the Church and was instrumental to God added to the Church. This was part of Apostolic ministry (Acts 2:2, 9:17, 10:44).

○ At Antioch North (AN)

- Having small groups meeting on multiple days during the week — along with weekly bible studies, evangelism and prayer meetings helps to set a platform for adding to the Church daily. (*AN group divisions allow for participation in these areas without burnout*).
- AN has a good number of people currently attending SG who have yet to attend 'services' in our building. Hopefully, that increases exponentially.
- AN's Small Group attendance is the 2nd largest weekly attendance, surpassing Sunday and Thursday night "sanctuary" gatherings.

PATTERN FOR SMALL GROUPS:

○ Structure and Patterns

- We are all aware that Church leaders will often attempt to duplicate structures and patterns of what they deem as an established or large church, even if that church isn't an Apostolic, and biblical representation.
- Since *home gatherings* were part of the original *Apostolic Church* structure, we can conclude they are fundamental to that structure. This element of the structure was never optional for the early church.
- The term "*pattern*" is defined as a repeated decorative design, decoration or ornament. It's an arrangement or sequence regularly found in comparable objects. We need the Apostolic patterns to go along with the Apostolic structure.
- While Acts 2 lists the foundational structure and pattern, each church will have its own characteristics and features unique to itself. Homes are often built based on geographical and climatical conditions.
 - There are no two homes exactly alike, there are no two leaders exactly alike. **There are no two churches exactly alike.**
 - Our approach to the peripheral, external elements may differ from church to church. This is by God's design.
 - The Care Group structure itself must allow for flexibility and adaptability in its design. Rigidity in design that doesn't allow for strong winds and earth shaking or hydrodynamic conditions will cause what is built to crumble. Rigidity is defined as the inability to adapt, change or to be bent out of shape.

○ Necessary Elements of the Apostolic Small Group

- Apostolic Teaching/Ministry of the Word - Acts 2:42 (*Allows God to minister to us*)
- Fellowship, breaking bread [sharing meals]- Acts 2:42, 46 (*Allows ministry to one other*).
- Prayers - Acts 2:42 (*Allows God to minister THROUGH us*)... vs 43-45 list the results
- Praise - Acts 2:47 (*Allows us to minister to God*)
- Evangelism - Acts 2:47 (*Allows is to minister to the lost*)...the great commission was a vital component of the Apostolic church [Matthew 28:18-19; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 1:8].
 - *The success of each group is dependent on the ability of the leader to keep the group passionate and focused on evangelism and relationship building (with God and man).*

○ Necessary Assessments for Small Groups

- Leadership and Oversight
 - When Jesus fed the multitudes, he observed them through the lens of a shepherd [sheep having no shepherd]. He fed and cared for "the flock" by separating them into numbered groups (Mark 6:40). Each apostle was responsible for their respective groups.
 - Advice from "Jethro" (Jethro = abundance). The principle applied in shaping structure. Exodus 18:21, 23 [*God command thee*], 25.
 - Leaders of numeric clusters (10s, 50s, 100s, 1000s)
- Inspect for Fruitlessness

Luke 13:6 *He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none.⁷ Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree,*

and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? 8 And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: 9 And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down. (Also see John 15:1-5)

- Beware the Ruts — If we are not careful, we will do things simply because that's the way we've always done it. *Routines becomes rituals. Rituals becomes religious traditions. And religion leaves you in a RUT.*

○ **Current AN Pattern**

- Teams, Groups, Assistants, Leader, Ministry Coordinator(s), Division Director(s), Pastoral Council.
 - MONTHLY: AN small groups are divided into 4 Teams responsible for monthly coverage.
 - WEEKLY: Three groups form one team responsible for weekly prayer & evangelism
 - DAILY: Outward ministry (eg. Bible Studies, Follow-up tracked thru Small Group)
- Mon:**HBS **Tues:** SG, HBS & WaR **Wed:**SG & HBS **Thur:** Service & HBS **Fri:** Intercessory Prayer Teams & HBS **Sat:** Evangelism Groups & HBS **Sun:** Service, Intercessory Prayer Teams]. Other supporting ministries collaborate with SG ministry.

PREPARATION FOR SMALL GROUPS

○ **Vision**

- What are some things the Lord is showing you for Small Groups? Pray about and appraise what you see and want to see.
- The vision must be seen by others that are to assist and participate.

Habakkuk 2:2-3 *And the LORD answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tables, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.*

 - The care groups should be constructed to accommodate the vision, not vice versa.
 - Don't build on or with rubbish (Nehemiah 4:2 & 10).

○ **Preparation**

- Church
 - Prepare the Church for what it will become.
 - What the Church hears as important, they will see as important.
 - If you don't have faith for Small Groups, your church won't.
- Leaders
 - Identify Leaders (Exodus 18:25)
 - Identify future leaders. Jesus called 'unlearned and ignorant' men. Don't call them once they are 'over qualified.'
 - We must prepare leaders and leaders must prepare themselves. Jesus spent three years preparing his disciples.

- External training, internal training, delegation, mentorship and accountability.
- A person is not trained until they learn by use and practice.
- Continued Equipping
- Be sure there is ONE Spirit of ministry (Numbers 11:25, John 14:17).
- As the number of people increases, and the number of groups increase, it becomes crucial to increase the number of leaders.
- Groups
 - Prepare the groups for what you expect to see in the groups
 - Prepare the groups for what should take place outside the meeting.
- Homes
 - Prepare the host and home
 - Establish the type of atmosphere
 - Not every home is conducive. Match homes, hosts and leaders.

○ **Formation**

- How each group forms and starts should vary to some extent.
 - A group grows beyond capacity
 - A group divides before full capacity
 - A leader develops and is ready to start with a few from current group
 - A leader develops and families from several groups form a new group
 - A group develops out of a Bible study
 - A placement of individuals from multiple groups form multiple new groups

PARTICIPATION IN SMALL GROUPS

○ **You must get people participating in the group**

- People oriented, not task oriented —Cultivation inside and outside the meetings. Encourage and lead in communication throughout the week. *[Chat App]*
- Planning: Include members of the group
- Partnership Grouping: clusters, not clicks (the bigger picture)
- Persuasion: Faith must be transmitted by the ministry of the Word.
- Power & Presence: If members and guests feel and hear from God, they will be motivated; whether it's a small still voice or the house was shaken.

2 Corinthians 2:4-5 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.