

Strategy Statement #1: Small Groups  
By Jeff Noblit



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**Anchored in Truth Ministries**

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We should, we ought to, we must continue to do even more and even better at walking out true biblical local church life. There's such a great and dire need for that. There's lots of stuff happening in churches, there's a lots of exciting things going on, but very often it's about three miles wide and a half an inch deep and it's not gonna last. When churches build their ministries on the last exciting fun thing, it's not gonna last, when I say to them, "Call me at year 39, tell me how it's going now. How far did that stuff carry you?" We've got a sure word from God and we need to stay with it.

So we need to continue on and do even a better job of modeling biblically healthy local church life and biblically healthy local church life for you, the congregation, is centered in small group ministries. That's kind of the hub of the wheel for your ministry to God in and through your local church, and if you'll keep being faithful, if you'll keep walking it out, and you'll still do more and do better of your ministry God's assigned you, then when I go to Idaho or I go to Kansas or I go to Brazil and meet with pastors from several Portuguese speaking countries or wherever, I will not be a hollow sound, I will not be a tare. You know, the tare in the Bible looks good but there's no real substance. I'll be able to bring a message of four decades of substance, but only if you as the body of Grace Life continue to bind to the vision, "We want to live it here so we can have impact there. We want to prove to the world God's word aided by God's power will build God's church." Period. You don't need Jeff Noblit. You don't need anything else. If God gives you a man of God and you've got the word of God and you stand on the word of God and your doctrine is sound and your methods are sound and the Spirit enables, God will bless that.

That's what's dire, great great, there's great great need for that, that message around the world, so make sure your pastor goes out not hollow but with substance. Romans 16:19, the Apostle Paul writes to the church at Rome, I love this verse, "the report of your obedience has reached to all." The report of the next cool, clever, wonderful, exciting, insightful thing to draw a crowd has reached to all? No, reported your obedience, church at Rome. And that's what I want our testimony to be. I want people to say, "Those people just follow the Scriptures and they have joy, they're sweet, they're excited, because God's word is sufficient." The report of your obedience has reached to all.

Another key verse, John 13:35 where Jesus said, "all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." Jesus said, "The hallmark statement to the world that you know Me is the way you love each other." Don't make this a

sentimentality kind of love, don't make this a silly emotional kind of love. You and I live in a culture today that's lost her principles because now everything is based on sentiment and emotion. We're, we're functioning in this country like a bunch of silly junior high schoolgirls instead of functioning on principle and on law like we ought to be.

But the love we have is a love that's based on Scripture. For example, is this love, this devotion I'm to have to other believers supposed to be expressed in just any way I feel? So just however I feel, that's the way I do it? Well, of course not. It's to be expressed according to the way the Scripture dictates. Is this love I feel for the brethren to be extended when and where and how long I decide? Of course not. You don't even join God's church, he adds you to his church. You're to camp your life in a biblically healthy local church and pour yourself out there in love when it feels good and when it doesn't feel good, when it's exciting and when it's not exciting, when you're seemingly in an important place or you're not in an important place. Love is a devotion. Love is a commitment. So we're to follow the Scriptures in how we as a congregation care for, encourage, disciple, reprove, rebuke, hold up, show mercy to, love one another.

So I'm gonna dive into our small group strategy statement. I know Brother Matt hit on this pretty well and he did a wonderful job, and he, he helped us greatly, but I hope my exhortation to you this morning will build on that. It wasn't too long ago I stayed at a hotel, well, it was long ago. I'm, I'll be 60 in February. You're old. That's the problem. You're getting old. If I'm 60, you're old. Probably 3ish decades ago, I was in a hotel and it was a new kind of hotel and its stock was just soaring and I talked to and I think he was like a regional guy who happened to be in the, the foyer of the hotel one morning and I asked him about this new approach to doing motels, and he said, "Well, if you've noticed up into this point, the majority of big hotel chains all have restaurants and many of them have also bars, and as time went on, we found that lots of money and lots of energy and lots of our overall personnel and financial resources end up on the restaurant and on the bar and our rooms would be in decline, our rooms would go down in quality. So we decided why don't we find out what travelers really want and put most of our eggs in that basket. So you'll notice we do not have a restaurant, we do not have a bar. We'll do a little breakfast thing in the morning and that's about it, but we put all of our energies and our resources and our efforts now in the, in the hotel room and it's going like crazy." Then you have Hampton Inn and you can just go down the list of that's what they do. They don't have restaurants. Now you're big, ah, 4 and 5 star hotels in cities still do, of course, but these, they don't have restaurants. They almost never have a bar, but they do the few things that really matter to the traveler. And that's what the church has got to do, approaching 3 ½ decades ago as God was stirring my heart about pastoral ministry, I thought, "We've got to find what the Bible says are the few main things we must do well, and if we will do those few things well, the other things will take care of themselves." And one of those key things that I said we've got to do this well is every member ministry in small groups.

So I wrote this strategy statement. I don't know how many years ago, 35, 38, I don't know, and we've been functioning by it ever since. It's not our only strategy statement but it is a primary foundational one for us and here it is. The church organized into small

groups so that we can evangelize the lost, equip the saved, and provide fellowship to meet individual needs. Now one of my temptations through the years is to elaborate and make it longer but I always come back and say, "No, everything is, is a component of those main things right there, organizing ourselves as a local church into small enough units where true body life, biblical body life can take place, and that body life is underlined under those three expressions: evangelizing, equipping and meeting needs."

But let's back up and let's break this thing down a phrase at a time. I. The church organized. Now it's not, wasn't too long ago that there was a strong movement in churches that if you really wanted to follow the Spirit, you gotta get away from structure and order; that what you had to do is just come into church and see where the Spirit led you, and while there was some truth to that, they were woefully out of balance because, you see, everything about our God is structured and orderly. Our God is a God of organization. He created the universe in an organized way. On day 1 he created day and night. On day 2 he separated the waters, the upper waters from the lower heavens. On day 3 he made dry land, seas and plant life. On day 4 he made the light-holders. On day 5 he made fish and birds. On day 6 he made land animals and man. And then he said, Genesis 1:31, "And God saw all that He made and behold it was very good." God said, "I like what I made and I like the way I made it. I like structure and order."

Everything God does has structure and order. Think about the Old Testament, God calls, ah, Abraham to father a great nation and through a series of events they have become millions of people, and God, what's he do? He organizes them. He organizes them into 12 tribes. The center of their worship was the tabernacle and the temple and everything about it is orderly. There's the place for the showbread. There's a place for the brazen altar. There's a place for the, the water laver. There's a place for the inner court and the outer court and the holy place and the Holy of Holies. It's structured and ordered.

He's a God of organization. Think about the offerings. They were organized. A grain offering. A sin offering. A, a, a, a, a, a guilty offering. And on and on and on you can go. He gave, ah, an order to how much it's to be. A tithe was the beginning place. And on and on we could go.

He organized the leadership of Israel. Kings have these responsibilities. Priests have these responsibilities. Prophets have these responsibilities. God is a God of order.

We come over to the New Testament chronologically speaking. God's mood, people are getting saved, the church at Jerusalem is growing and growing and we get to Acts 6, we have some of the widow ladies in the church who are not being administered their daily food, serious problem. Pastors got together and organized deacons and he said these deacons are gonna take care of this ministry and we're gonna take care of the ministry of the word, an orderly organized way to function. Ephesians 4:11-12, God gives apostles, prophets and pastor/teachers, an orderly way to structure his work of leadership in the New Testament. 2 Timothy 2:2 talks about the orderly way the Apostle Paul would get men together and train them for leadership in the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:34, Paul himself is organizing a disorderly church. That's one of the nicest things you could say

about the church at Corinth. He said, "I'm literally gonna come back again and I'm gonna put things in order," what remains, that is.

And even the rapture is organized. The dead in Christ will rise first, then those who are alive and remain will join them and we'll meet the Lord in the air. Our God is a God of order and organization. Paul told the Corinthians church in 1 Corinthians 14:40, but let all things be done properly and in an orderly manner.

When you've preached as long as I have to one people, you tend to use the same illustrations again and some of them are corny but I like them. You remember the illustration of the little boy sitting in the church service? Now this was kind of a small rural church and in Baptist churches there's always a plaque would be on the wall behind like the piano and the organ. And the little boy is sitting with his mom and he sees a plaque behind the piano, he said, "Mom, what is that on the wall?" She said, "That's a plaque." He said, "Well, what kind of plaque?" She said, "It's in honor of those who died in the service." He said, "Which service? The AM service or the PM service?" It's corny but I like it. Don't you like it? I like it because some churches are so dead sometimes.

So there was a movement some time ago that said, "No structure. No order. Follow the Spirit." Here's what I'm gonna tell ya: you can organize death, that's for sure, you go into the funeral home, it's one of the most organized places in town, you can organize death but here's what I'm gonna tell you, you must organize life. Take your human body. What structure, what intricate organization, the nervous system, the respiratory system, the digestive system, everything's structured and orderly because if something gets out of whack, the whole body dies. God's ordained order and structure for his people.

Let's go a phrase further. The church organized, now let's go into small groups, that's II. Now of all the ways we organize and of all the structures, one thing we must have, one great foundation stone, we see it throughout Scripture is God's people coming as one congregation and then subdividing into smaller groups so they can live out effective ministry one to another and God will be glorified.

Go to Moses, go to Moses, he's not here. Ah, go to Exodus 18, would you do that? Exodus 18. Very quickly, this is such a powerful and good and most of you remember this or at least many of you do. Exodus 18:13, "It came about the next day that Moses sat to judge the people, and the people stood about Moses from the morning until the evening." Now here Moses is, the pastor of the people, if you will, and everybody comes to Moses for every need, then we have, look at verse 14, "Now when Moses' father-in-law saw all that he was doing for the people, he said, 'What is this thing that you are doing for the people? You, why do you alone sit as judge and all the people stand about you from morning until evening?' And Moses said to his father-in-law, 'Because the people come to me to inquire of God.'" Verse 16, "When they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I judge between a man and his neighbor and make known the statutes of God and His laws." Verse 17, "Moses' father-in-law said to him, 'The thing you're doing is not good.' You don't have any organized structure to effectively minister to all these people and this is bad. Verse 18, why is it bad? Verse 18, "You will surely wear out." Jethro

says, "Moses, you need to be around a long time to lead and pastor these people and if you keep doing it, you're gonna wear out. Not only that, you're gonna wear them out." He says, "both yourself and these people who are with you, the task is too heavy for you; you cannot do it alone." So he said the people are gonna grow weary because they're not gonna feel ministered to, there's not enough of you to go around, and you're gonna wear out too. This is not the way God wants this done.

Verse 21, look at verse 21, "Furthermore, you shall select out of all the people able men who fear God, men of truth, those who hate dishonest gain; and you shall place these over them as leaders of thousands, of hundreds, of fifties and of tens." Alright, let's break the whole country down Jethro tells Moses. Get a large group, maybe that's like our congregation, then break that down into smaller divisions and break that down into even smaller, what we would call small groups, and that's the way our small groups are structured, divisional areas break down into smaller groups and elders and church staff oversee each division.

Now folks, are you listening to me? You can't do that and make it work well without lots and lots and lots of hard work. It would be easier to have just, or rather to have a church primarily built on an exciting event once a week on Sunday but that's not what a church is. It's not just the event, it's a body of changed people who love and care for each other and there needs to be a structure to enable that to happen, and that's why the Bible in Exodus 18 gives us this picture of small groups.

He continues on and says, "And they're gonna judge the people at all times. Every major dispute will be brought to you but all the rest of them will stay out there and they will be taken care of by them." Verse 24, "Moses listened to his father-in-law and did all that he had said."

Now let's go chronologically out of the Old Testament into the New Testament. What's one of the very first things Jesus did in his earthly ministry? He chose 12 men that they might be with him in his own small group. Unique, a one-time thing. Jesus isn't on the earth anymore but nevertheless in Jesus' earthly ministry, local congregations are not established yet, that happened, that started happening at Pentecost in the book of Acts, but yet the principle that if we're gonna be effective, we need to have an organization of small groups.

Now we come chronologically to the day of Pentecost has come, we could, Acts 2:41-, 46, and 5:42, "So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls." Now notice this, "and day to day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house." That's small groups. They were all in the temple, that's congregational worship, then they broke down house to house, that's small groups. "They were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart... And every day, in the temple," congregation, "and from house to house," small groups, "they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

We go forward to the Gentile church. 2 Timothy 2:2, Paul tells Timothy, "In the local church there at Ephesus, Timothy, make some small groups and this is the best way to train future leaders for God's work." It's impossible for a church to obey Scripture and to be ministering effectively without a well-organized, well-run small group ministry, and I promise you, Brother David Young is tenacious in his commitment to see that small groups run well. As a matter of fact, he gets real aggravated if everything's not going just right. About once a month I have to take him off O'Neal Bridge and say, "Don't jump in yet. It's gonna be alright." But that's what we need because this is vital to being a church.

Alright, let's go to the next phrase. The church organized because our God is a God of structure and order, always has been, always will be, into smaller groups, number 3 now, III, to evangelize the lost. The early church when they got together in their small groups, they viewed that as an opportunity to say who else can come in here and join us, open enrollment we call it in Baptist life for decades. You can enroll in our small group and not be a church member yet but you can be a part of our Bible study, come to our cook-outs, come to our fellowships. Why? Because we want to share with you the things of Christ. So evangelism is a primary purpose of why we have small groups.

Acts 5:42 again, "And every day, in the temple and from house to house, they kept right on teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ." That's evangelism and we know from Acts 5, scores of unbelievers were coming to these meetings and they were hearing the Gospel, and God would keep saving more and more of them. Can I ask you something? Every one of you listen to your pastor this morning: when's the last time someone who is enrolled in your small group came to faith in Jesus Christ? Then weep until God gives you one. Pray until God gives you one. Seek God. Say, "God, we cannot go through small group year and you not use us to find one man and reach him for the Gospel of Jesus Christ, or one woman who's lost and reach her for the Gospel." We need to stir that back up again at Grace Life Church. If your view of the doctrines of sovereign grace does not include trying to reach all people with the Gospel and urging all to repent and be saved, you have perverted the doctrine of sovereign grace. One of the main purposes for small groups is to build relationship with lost folks and get them involved in helping us reach the lost.

Romans 12:6-10 gives us a, ah, demonstrative list of, of spiritual gifts. Not, not, not a, ah, a exhaustive list but a, a, a, a, a demonstration of different gifts, and you have these differing gifts in your small group. For example, he talks about prophecy. He talks about, ah, teaching. He talks about service. There they are on the screen. Giving. Leading, Mercy. You see, everybody with the way God enabled you – now listen – can be a part of your small group teams' effort to reach somebody with the Gospel. Think about how much a person with the gift of mercy can love and care and encourage a lady who comes to your small group who's not saved yet. Or a man who comes into your small group who's not saved yet. The person with the gift of mercy is so vital in that. They may not be always comfortable with sharing the Gospel but they can care and show compassion. And then on and on: giving and leading and exhorting. Of course, teaching is teaching the Gospel. Service, the way you can serve these people. How powerful that is. Listen, that way every single class member gets in on evangelism and every single church member is

a part of reaching the lost. Isn't God wise to give us these structures? Yes, it is primarily the preaching of the word God has ordained for the conversion of the soul, but if they come to small groups, it's highly likely they're gonna sit under the preaching of the word. As a matter of fact, almost always they will.

Now I want to, I want to combat a, a, a woeful, selfish, fleshly error that's been around forever and that is that your spiritual gift is given to you to bless you. I've talked to people before about, ah, they might be in a congregation where they believe in the signs and wonders and miracle gifts, and sometimes they'll speak in a tongue, sometimes they'll be slain on the floor, etc. etc., and not all the time but sometimes you'll ask those folks, "Why do you believe it?" Well, it's such a blessing. You needed such a blessing. While that's not error completely, it's out of balance and that is from this perspective: your small gift is primarily not for, your rather spiritual gift is primarily not for you, it's for your church family through you. Did you hear me? God gifted you for the good of your church, not to bless you. That's why Paul could write to the Corinthians and say, "Hush up this tongues talking if it's hurting people, if it's confusing people." And a, a number of other things they were perverting. Do you know why they were perverting it? They were thinking about themselves and not the good of the body of Christ.

1 Corinthians 12:7, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good." It's for the common good. It's for others in the church. You have the gift of service for others. You have the gift of teaching for others. You have the gift of mercy for others. And there's no way you can effectively do that and make sure that whole congregation is cared for unless there's a small group structure to make sure nobody can fall through the cracks. A man told me years ago, been in our church forever, he said, "You know what? If you fall through the cracks of Grace Life Church, it's because you walk around with your head down looking for one to fall through." I appreciate that.

I, ah, another illustration you've heard before. When my girls were smaller, we really enjoyed watching the University of Tennessee Lady Vols basketball team play. Coach Pat Summit was the coach, I believe one of the greatest coaches of any sport of all time. Tough as nails but, man, her girls loved her. Well, it's hard to get that balance and I remember watching a game and she had this little feisty point guard who's really good, but the other team had a, another feisty little guard who was about as good, and she was putting it on Pat Summit's little point guard, and roughing her up a little bit, and on one occasion she knocked the little Tennessee point guard down and the Tennessee point guard jumped up and went toward her and was screaming toward her and she got a technical foul. I mean, the moment that referee called technical foul, Pat Summit blasted off of the bench. She's 7-8-10 feet on the floor, she's pointing her finger at that little point guard and she says to the little point guard, you can hear it over the television, "It's not about you!" That's what she said. I've never forgotten that. I never got over that. You're going after that girl and getting a technical foul and hurting your whole team because you're thinking about you. This ain't about you, it's about the team.

That's why God saved you. That's why God's given you special gifts and he's given you a special gift mix he's given nobody else, and you have gifts in your small groups nobody

else has exactly like you, and it's not about you, it's about the good of the body, the good of your small group. Now I know I'm preaching to the choir. We've been standing on these things for over three decades, but sometimes you need a refresher.

As a team, every church member through small groups can be a part of reaching the lost. I'll never forget talking to a lady, this is some years ago, and I think we had seven ladies in this woman's small group who was baptized in that church year. Seven ladies. And I asked her, I said, "Tell me just practically how this worked." Now we all know the sovereignty of God and the Gospel saves, we understand that but it's amazing, like Jerry Falwell used to say back when he was around, Jerry Falwell said, "You know, the more doors I knock on, the more elect I find." Do you get that? Yes, God just saves his elect but the more you reach out, the more you witness, the more who are gonna come to Christ. I asked this lady, I said, "Tell me what you did." And she listed these things, she said, "We would always take food to their household if they had any kind of a need. We would keep their children so she and her husband could have a date night, or if there was something at church and she could go, one of our ladies would keep her children so she could come. We would regularly send cards and letters to say we're praying for you, we love you, we're so glad you're visiting our small group. We would counsel with her about problems she had in the home with the child or maybe with her husband. We would share our testimony of our conversion whenever it was appropriate time and the door was open for that. We certainly visited her on church visitation. We made sure her children were brought to church, ah, events for children. And we just did those things and one by one those ladies came to faith in Christ." The team effort to evangelize the lost through small groups.

And I want to challenge you to draw a line in the sand, guys, because, men, you've got to lead the way. You've gotta be the example. And you get you a prospect list in your class, it doesn't matter if it's a seven year old grandchild, they don't have to be your age, but get your men to think about who's lost that you know and let's go before God and let's keep pounding God in prayer until for his own glory we see some of these men get saved. God just seems to respond when his people are burdened for souls. Let's revive that at Grace Life Church.

IV. The church organized, into small groups to evangelize the lost and to equip the saved. It's, it's that place where Christians, I use the word equipped not because I like it better than others, you could say disciple, you could say mentor, you could say train, it's all the same idea, but we remind ourselves that Jesus equipped believers in his small group. He chose 12, the Bible says, that he might be with them and then that he might send them out to preach. Notice being with them is the priority. In the small group, being with them, train and equip them for ministry.

In your small group, every year there are men and women in there and your goal should be through this small group year, they don't know it yet and I'm not gonna tell them yet because it'll scare them to death, but they're future leader, but they need to be in here doing the work with us first. This is their equipping and later they will be serving and leading. It takes some time but that's a great way to do it.

The first church, the apostles used their small groups to equip believers. Acts 2:42-46, again, they met in Solomon's portico and house to house in small groups and there they were edifying and building up, equipping one another. The Apostle Paul as the Gospel spread through the Gentile regions would organize people into smaller groups that they might be discipled.

One of the things I studied while I was gone was the Calvinist-Methodist of 18<sup>th</sup> century England, and the Calvinist-Methodists were all members of the Anglican Church and they were not going to leave the Anglican Church because it was the state Church of England and you shouldn't do that, but they knew the Anglican Church was dead, they knew it was spiritually bankrupt, they knew people were lost, so they preached the Gospel to these Anglicans and they would be getting saved and as they got saved, they couldn't formerly take them out of the state church, they should have, but they didn't, but they formed what they called societies instead of local churches, and they would have strict, ah, ah, ah, guidance for who could get into the society, you had to show that you were truly born again, a very Baptistic concept, Baptists of the day were already doing it. And by the way, every time I study church history, I can always find Baptists who are already doing it right. Did you hear me? I don't know why Whitefield and Wesley and these guys get all the attention. They were great men and I thank God for them, but there were faithful Baptist guys who had the whole package while these guys were just figuring it out. Well, that's a side note.

Whitefield and Wesley, they split up later on but they're, they're getting these people saved and they formed these societies and guess what they did? They broke the societies down into small groups so they could disciple, equip, care for and build up one another. That's what we do. Because that was lacking in the Anglican Church because in the Anglican Church, the Church of England of the day, all they did was sprinkle you as a baby, chunk you back on a pew and hope you stayed around, and they knew that was wrong. Now later on John Wesley did start churches out of his groups. Whitefield didn't organize his. Whitefield had the more sound doctrine but he didn't organize and there's so much I'd like to say about this, but the glaring deficiency of the Methodist movement in 18<sup>th</sup> century England, Whitefield, Wesley and others, was it did not come out of a sound local church. They were just itinerants. They were not coming out of a church that was already living it out. Are you with me, Grace Life? That's what was missing and by the grace of God that's what we have. We're seeing churches planted and started around the world but it's as an extension of an established local church which is the New Testament model.

So anyway, they were organizing these people into small groups. We find it in Jesus' ministry, we find it as the apostles begin in Acts 2, we find it as the Gospel went to the Gentile regions and Gentile churches are established, and one, one primary aspect I want you to get in your mind for your small group is the word "modeling." Are you listening to me? You can't formally disciple more men than I've discipled yet most of those I formally discipled are no longer with us, but the men I just modeled it before, most of them are still with us. So don't think your little formal discipleship training is gonna get the job

done. It's not. It's good but the main thing is that as you do small group ministry, as you're caring for one another, as you correct somebody who's in sin, as you hold up somebody, as you pray for the lost, you know what you're doing? You're modeling in front of another church member, maybe a newer believer, maybe somebody who hasn't grown up to that point, and from watching your small group minister biblically, you're modeling how it's done and then after awhile they're ready to lead one themselves.

So modeling is so important. Have you ever thought about it? Jesus to establish the most important institution in the history of mankind, the church, did almost, very, well, let me put it, he did very little formal training but a lot of lifestyle modeling. He taught as he did it. He did it and taught and that's what's backwards in the church today. You know how many experts we've got out there teaching church stuff today who've never done it in the church? I mean, the woods are full of them. There are, and I like these guys and they do teach good stuff and they're wonderfully gifted teachers and greatly, ah, gifted theologians and they're very solid in their doctrine, but the one thing they haven't done is pastored well and pastored long, so it's hard for them to model and illustrate. I've said it many many times before, but if you go into get surgery and the doctor comes in and it's a pretty serious surgery and the surgeon comes in and you say, "Doc, I know you're gonna operate on me in the morning. Can I ask you a question?" He said, "Yeah." You said, "How many of these have you performed?" He said, "Well, I haven't done one." "You've never done a surgery?" He said, "No, but I'm telling you what, I've read the best books. I know all the concepts and I'm a wonderful communicator. I go to all the medical societies and teach on it." I'm gonna say, "Well, find some fellas not as sharp as you but has cut on about 3,000 people and done this and bring him in here. I want somebody that's lived it out." And that's what Jesus did, he lived it out and as these disciples were with him as he went along preaching the Gospel, discipling, rebuking sin, all the ministries he did, they were like, ah, little, ah, recorders with the record mechanism on learning by his modeling. When you pray, guys, in your small groups, somebody's learning to pray. When you share the Gospel and you've got somebody with you, somebody's learning how to share their faith. When you talk about how you love your wife and sacrifice for her, somebody in your class is learning how to love their wife like Christ loved the church. And on and on and on we could go. Modeling. You can't model in here, all you can do in here is listen to me yell at you, but if I get you in small groups and you open the word of God and you study the word of God and you care for each other and you minister to each other, modeling can happen and that's Jesus' primary way of equipping disciples.

Number 4, it's the last one: and provide fellowship to meet individual needs. When you get in a class, you open the word of God, the Spirit of God begins to work and there begins to be a bonding in there. Now this is different than a fleshly bonding or a secular concept of bonding because it's bonding – now listen to me – around the truth of the word enabled by the power of the Spirit. We don't bond around we're all ball players. We don't bond around we're all on the football team. There's, that's an okay bonding but this is radically superior to that and more important. This is a bonding based on the truth of Scripture and the Spirit's changed us, and so there's a bonding that happens and then from that bonding a transparency begins to occur. Men begin to open up a little bit and they then begin to share, I say men because the ladies are usually way ahead of the men here,

men begin to be a little transparent about where their struggle is, where their weakness is, and then the brother can pray for them and help them and hold them accountable.

Bonding and then transparency and then meeting needs. Bonding makes us more open, transparency and then we're free to meet one another's needs. Year ago there was a person in a small group, in a senior adult level small group, and the other people in the small group could tell they were kind of distressed and they began to talk a little about it. I don't know how it all unfolded actually, but the person told the small group, "My spouse is adamantly against me tithing. They don't want me to tithe and I'm deeply convicted that that's biblical and I ought to be doing that and I'm just struggling." And the others in that small group gathered around, loved, encouraged, ministered and prayed for that person in the small group. That kind of bonding in ministry can't happen anywhere but in small groups. If the church isn't organized to do that, that's lost.

And I pick on my couple's classes because some of you are hiding out in there. I'm not saying it's sin, I'm just saying some of you need to graduate because men can bond and care for men in marvelous wonderful ways that will never happen if the ladies are present. And ladies can bond, hold each other accountable, and minister to each other in ways that will never happen if the guys are present. So it's not unbiblical to be in a couple's small group but we never see the kind of spiritual biblical discipling in couple's classes we see in the men's and women's classes. Both are good, just don't hide out in one.

Just remember in your small group as you're providing this fellowship, this bonding, this transparency to try to meet one another's needs, remember there's many in your class that will need help to repent of sin and that's a ministry of the small group, to lovingly come alongside a brother and call their attention to a sin or a compromise and help them through it, and by the way, once again, always always always with utmost confidentiality. You never talk about their sin to others, only to them. Period. The only time a sin is made public is when somebody is in brazen hardened rebellion and it has to be brought before the church ultimately. That's the only time. Every every every precaution must be made, made to correct a brother or sister in private, which is what Matthew teaches us, Matthew 18.

Some need help to repent of sin, small groups is the place where that can happen because once you've been in there and there's some bonding and some transparency, you receive that because you know those brothers care about you. But if it's just maybe a church elder that comes knocking on your door, then they hadn't been around you, they haven't been in hours of Bible study with you etc. etc., it's not the same. The intimacy of the small group makes it effective.

Some need help in overcoming sin. Some know they've been in sin. Some, and by the way, is there anybody in here that's not a repenter of sin? Everybody, anybody in here that's through sinning? You'd a fit with John Wesley because he taught that, you know, he taught you could get to sinless perfection. No, we're all repenters but sometimes there's a unique stronghold and a unique struggle and we need brothers to help us and only in a

small group do you have the possibility of men or women opening up enough to say, "Here's where the struggle is. Help me." And in utter confidentiality, we come alongside them and encourage them and love them and help them with their overcoming sin.

Some need help to repent of sin. Some need help to overcome sin. Some need help with a physical crisis and how I've seen this throughout the years, that you'll take up offerings and, and, and do things, maybe it's a sack of groceries or whatever it might be, and then if it's a big enough financial burden, the whole church gets behind it with our benevolence fund.

Some need help in time of bereavement and sorrow and what a wonderful and beautiful picture it is to the world when not the hired carer, not the hired minister does the caring, but the body does the caring. We all do it together for each other. I bet you, hundreds, at least hundreds of times I have heard from the community, "Man, the way your people care for each other." "All men will know you're my disciples by the love you have one for another." But always small groups enables that to actually happen and that's why God gives it to us.

Well, in conclusion, at the end of the day how do you keep a people motivated and active in small group ministry because let me tell you something, you can do every bit of the machine I put together in the flesh and be successful outwardly, you can do the whole machine, the whole thing we've laid out here and it will work as far as drawing people and getting people active, but it can be completely a fleshly thing. "Just look at us, look how good we're doing it." That's wickedness. Not what the church is about, not about us showing off and bragging about our system. It's not what we're to be doing.

How can we keep our folks motivated and active in small group ministry? Well, there's one absolutely or absolute key principle motivation that I've been laboring for years to get into your bone marrow, and that is the glory of God. God is seen, God is shown forth when his people out of real love for him and real love for each other that he put in us for each other, really live out this caring for one another. That glorifies God and that motivates me. I can tell you as a pastor, man, have we not been through some stuff as a church. Have I not been through some things as a pastor. There's no way, there's no way, there is no way I would have stayed the course for 39 years except that one motivation, I believe this brings glory to my God and so I'm gonna keep on going.

Can I say something to you? Idaho, Kansas, the Portuguese speaking world, all over Europe through varied kings, ministries, all the plants we have, all of them are on the line, all of them have asked us, "Come alongside and help us," all of them are saying, "Keep on keeping on. We need hope." These little pastors, and I don't mean that derogatory I just mean they're young, like this guy I'm gonna meet with tomorrow, he's gonna come to the True Church Conference, he's gonna walk in the door and here's what he's saying, "Is this real?" That's what he's gonna say. "Is it real?" He knows what I'm about. He watches me and listens to me. He's watching you to decide, "Is this real?"

Here's what I'm gonna tell you: don't quit. Don't quit! Don't coast! Don't let up! Don't give in! And here's what many of you have got to do, you've got to understand that it's not the way it was when I was in high school and on Wednesday football practice our coach would call us in and say, "We're getting out early because we've got church on Wednesday night." They don't respect church anymore. Now I'm not, I'm not talking about our folks here. I know there's some good brothers in our athletic department, I'm talking about generally as a culture they don't respect church anymore. And you young families are gonna make some hard decisions about limiting your involvement in secular things because there's not time for this if you do all of that. That's not evil, it's just Satan knows how to get you. He just dumps on you this guilt trip that if your kids don't do all this stuff, "Oh, they missed out on life. They're not gonna be popular. They not gonna have everything I had and I want them to have more than I have." Look, that's a lie from hell. Yes, it's good and right for us to be active in the world. That's proper, but you've got to have the wisdom to know when to say, "Whoa, that's enough! Time out! We're not going any further because God has saved us, God has changed me, God's given me a biblical church, I've gotta dive in there and be a part of this because the glory of my God is on the line and the good impact of our ministry around the world is on the line."

This just stirred me as during my break, I was emailing and calling and talking to these pastors and these mission points and I just realized afresh it's like God said to me, "Brother Jeff, if your folks don't really live it, then you're a hypocrite." At the end of the day, you've got to grab ahold of, "This makes much of God. This is the way He's designed to be glorified and I'm gonna get in on it."

As we are effective in small groups, evangelizing, equipping, meeting needs, it shows the love of God, it shows the wisdom of God because he designed it to work this way, it shows the power of God because he changed us and gave us this desire by his power to really care for each other this way. I'll be honest, before I was converted, I wouldn't care for most of you. You wouldn't have been my kind of people. But God changed me and can I be honest again? I love you. I love everything about you because you love my Christ and I love your Christ.

That's the power of God, it shows the power of God, it shows the love of God, the power of God, it shows the faithfulness of God in that he's developed a way that for at least four decades we've been at it right at four decades, it works and his sheep are cared for and his church is strengthened and built up. It shows the faithfulness of God. It shows the goodness of God. It's a provision that God's given us, this small group ministry, to bless and encourage us and to save others. It shows the holiness of God because in small groups we help each other with sanctification. And as we faithfully live out small group ministries, we are vessels through which God shows the world his unequaled glories and attributes.

The glory of God is everything. Now don't leave that. The glory of God is everything. When Jesus comes and everything's done, the centerpiece of the universe will be the glory of God. You might as well get in on it early, get in on it now. The glory of God is everything. God is most glorified in his church. That's the way he's designed it to work.

He's glorified in your work, in your school, in a thousand different ways when you honor him, but primarily he's glorified in his church. The glory of God is everything. He is the most glorified in his church and for the church to glorify him, it needs to be truly, biblically, spiritually healthy and a spiritually, biblically, healthy church must have effective continual small group ministry. This is not an easy work. It's not always fun. It's not always encouraging, but it is essential. Don't quit and if you're coasting, get back on the team. At the very least you can show up and be sweet and loving and encouraging, and you might stumble into actually doing something.

I told Brother David, I texted him last night and said, "Brother David, I'm gonna give you a number. I want you..." Did you remember the number? I'm not gonna call on you if you don't know it. 87 is the number. I got a call from Europe and the ministry leader in Europe said, "I've been telling our European brothers that not all American churches are shallow and carnal and just big in numbers but no real substance. Some of them are really trying to be solid and healthy so will you send me your numbers?" I said, "Oh me, I hope my numbers are good. I hope our numbers don't reflect that we've got 3,000 on the roll and 700 in attendance." That's not unusual, by the way. That's kind of common. And in all the numbers, getting back to small groups, I found out something, I found out that we have averaged 87% of our membership in small groups every week. 87% of our church membership is active in small groups every week. Can I tell you something? Compared to other churches of any size, that's phenomenally large. That's unbelievably large. Now don't pat yourself on the back. That's like the folks at the cancer ward thinking they're doing good because they're looking for folks at the funeral home. They're all dead. Just because we're better than some don't mean we're doing that great.

Now I'm thankful for that, but here's my challenge, let's make that 90. Let's don't stay at 80, I don't even like 80, the 87 doesn't even sound good, 87. Let's make that 90. If just a few of you would just a little, do a little more for your small groups this next year, we can might not make that 87 but make it 90. And then to boil that all down into what we're all about, that's just a little more effectiveness, a little more ministry, a little more love, a little more living out what God's called us to do in small groups and a little more glory expressed about our God to the world. If it goes down to 85, David and I both go to O'Neal Bridge, alright? Alright so, David, you've got to hold us all accountable. We're going for 90. We're going for 90. Let's get it to where 90% of our membership is in small groups every week.

Well, do you still love me? That's what happens when I get away for five or six weeks and just think. Next week, God willing, we'll be back in 1 Timothy 3, alright?