

Loving What God Loves and Living for What Christ Died for (part 2) The Gift of Care Groups

God has chosen to advance the Gospel through the mission of the local church.

God intends the local church to be a *local*, corporate display of His glory and wisdom both to unbelievers and to unseen spiritual powers. (Ephesians 3:10)

Mark Dever: "God's purposes for all of human history revolve around the local church as the visible, corporate manifestation of His Son, Jesus Christ! He has ordained that His most important objectives both here and in heaven be accomplished through the agency of the local church."

It's no secret, we want to see the body of Christ grow in number but we want to raise up mature disciples; a people who know how to live where they are for the glory of God – people who are growing together in their relationship with God and in their relationships with each other. In order to plant more churches we must first and foremost be the church planted.

Text: Hebrews 10:19-25

The book of Hebrews was written to encourage the church as they were experiencing a time of trial. Its emphasis is on the supremacy of Christ. *God's people can now have full confidence in God's Son, the perfect High Priest, who gives those who trust in his work on the cross full access to God.*

Hebrews 9:26 says, *Christ has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.*

In light of what Christ has done for us, we're now called and enabled to do the things mentioned in our text today; we have the *privilege* of doing these things. What are "these things"?

These exhortations are plural:

Let *us* draw near to God. Let *us* hold fast to our hope, let *us* stir up one another to love and good works, let *us* not neglect meeting together, and let *us* encourage one another.

We're encouraged to do all of these things *together*.

Where *do* we get this concept of Care Groups?

Well you won't find the title "Care Groups" in the Bible, but you will find that throughout the Bible Christians are called to live out their faith in Christ **together**.

God never called us to be mere spectators.

He's called us to participate in one another's lives.

Christ established the church with purpose - and your growth (and your helping others to grow) is part of that purpose.

You and I are not called to live this life on our own.

Christians are called and enabled to live out their new life in Christ together.

Because of the finished work of Christ on the cross we can draw near to God, we can hold onto the hope we profess and we can stir up one another to love and good works.

If this is the case then how is it worked out? The Sunday corporate meeting is part of it. But there's more.

Verses 24 and 25 tell us to *consider how* to stir up one another to love and good works. They tell us not to neglect meeting together. They tell us to encourage one another.

Hebrews 10:19-25 is just one of many scripture references pointing us to the importance of living life together. There are others:

Romans 12:5 - Be Joined to one another

Romans 12:10 - Be devoted to one another

Counsel (**Rom. 15:14**) and honor (**Rom. 12:10**) one another.

Confess your sins to, forgive, bear with, carry the burdens of, be kind to, teach and admonish, build up, pray for, and love one another. The list could go on!

I want us to consider *how* care groups provide a place to do all of these things and more.

I want us to consider *why* our care groups exist and what *God's* purpose is for them.

Care group is a means of grace.

A means is something that helps bring us to a specific goal. A "means of grace" helps us position ourselves to receive God's grace. This grace includes real life change, genuine growth, meaningful fellowship and a deeper knowledge and love for the Savior.

Care groups provide a place for...

1. The Application of God's Word

Everything that takes place in a care group should be taking place in light of God's Word. This is Primary.

We're learning to apply the preached Word to our lives.

The text we study each week has an original audience and an original meaning.

It's meaning won't change. And our first goal is to discover this fixed thing. What is God speaking to us? What does this text reveal about God's character? How does this text point us to the gospel? What claim or claims does this text place on our lives? How are we called to respond?

We want to be doers of the Word, not only hearers. The book of James reminds us that a hearer of the Word is only deceiving himself.

One of the greatest ways you and I can stir up one another to love and good works is by applying the Word of God to our lives and making sure that those we gather with to hear God's Word preached are applying that very Word to their own lives.

True change will not come apart from the Word of God.

Care groups provide a place for...

2. Accountability

We need others to help us in our pursuit of sanctification.

God *is* at work in the lives of his people.

I can tell you with absolute certainty that I know what the will of the Lord is for you! Your sanctification!

Sanctification is the progressive work of God that makes us more and more free from sin and like Christ in our lives. It's the working out of salvation in our lives.

According to the book "Why Small Groups?" accountability means that we seek the help of others in our relationship with God.

We open our lives to a few carefully selected, trusted individuals who will be faithful to speak the truth in love to us.

They are given the right to examine, approve and give counsel.

It's not that we want to just talk about sin all day and share all the places we're struggling in as if that's an end in itself!

No, we want to grow; we want to glorify God. And because sin is so deceitful, because sin is so hardening we need the help of those around us.

Other people see things that we can't.

Would you tell someone if they had something stuck in their teeth? Valerie has said, "*A good friend will tell you if you had something stuck in your teeth.*"

We need someone to tell us. Why? We can't see it. We don't know it's there.

What if I wasn't convinced?

What would you hold up to me to show me and convince me that I *do* have something stuck in my teeth? A mirror!

A faithful friend will hold the "mirror" of God's Word up to you when you are deceived by sin.

Please place that mirror in front of me! I don't want to remain the same!

Read Hebrews 3:12-13

Sin is deceitful.

It has a numbing effect. No one is exempt from its deceitfulness.

God has given us each other in this fight against sin.
CJ Mahaney has said, *The Christian is free from the **penalty** and the **dominion** of sin* (and we praise God for this victory in Christ Jesus!) *but the Christian is not free from the **presence** and the **influence** of sin.*

We need to look out for one another. I need someone to love me enough to speak the truth to me!

This is not the exclusive job of your care group leader.
Care group involves **everyone** caring for **each other**.

There's a particular CG experience where Valerie and I were sharing a conflict. We were confessing some sin and talking through the conflict. I felt at liberty to talk freely since I believed that Valerie was the one in the wrong. Then without a moments notice Jerry turned it all around on me – all of a sudden it was me. I was the one not caring for my wife, I was the selfish party, I was the one walking in pride!

This was intrusive, offensive, hard to deal with...at first. But by God's grace the Holy Spirit was at work. He was dealing with my heart. And he used Jerry to point out my sin. Jerry didn't stop there though. He pointed me to the cross and to the grace of God.

Is there someone who's in your life that will question your motives and care for *you* enough to ask for an explanation of your actions when appropriate?

Accountability is not an optional practice for the Christian.
If you're serious about change you'll seek the accountability of those God has placed around you.

What should you do?

Don't wait. Invite. Do this as soon as you can.

Paul Tripp: *"It is not about lying in wait to catch them doing wrong. The purpose of accountability is to assist people to do what is right for the long run...Accountability provides loving structure, guidance, encouragement, and warning to someone who is fully committed to the change God is working in his life."*

Confess sins to those in your care group. Ask for help in specific areas.
Let those in your CG know that you desire their input and prayer and questions.
When's the last time you invited the observations of others?

"The person who makes accountability work is always the person being held accountable."

My wife Valerie and I went to the mall with our niece Laney and her parents. While we were there she wanted to ride a small merry go round. She had just started walking and I was concerned that she wouldn't be able to hold on tight enough. Her mom assured me that she would be ok. With her aunt, uncle, mom and dad surrounding the merry go round ready to catch her if need be, little Laney held on. But there was one distraction: there was a mirror that Laney kept looking at, lifting one hand off the pole to wave at herself. "Hold on!" I said. "Laney, hold on." She would have fallen if she *kept* waving at herself.

We wave at ourselves.

We go through life distracted by ourselves. Is there anyone in our lives faithful enough to redirect our attention off of ourselves and onto the needs of others?

How do you come to church on Sunday? How do you attend CG? Are you "waving at yourself" or are you holding on to the truth of God as tight as you can and looking for opportunities to care for those around you?

Let's talk about God – share truth that's been affecting you lately – and listen to others who want to do the same.

This will require you to do what Philippians 2 tells us to do: "to do nothing and to do everything"! What do I mean?

Care groups provide a place for...

3. Encouragement (Hebrews 10:25)

People go far too long not knowing where God is at work in their lives!
How should we be encouraging one another? Where do you see the fruit of the Spirit at work? Where do you see the Gifts of the Spirit at work?

Our main problem is that we're not *loving* those in our CG. This takes work. This takes time. It takes considering others as better than ourselves.
Do you ask questions? Do you listen? Are you a student of those in your CG?

4. Mutual Care

When people begin to enter into real life relationships with each other, real life issues come up!
We begin to experience life together: in life there's pain, there's loss, there's joy, there's happiness, there's those awkward moments that you learn to laugh at after they happen...

Everything we have spoken of today falls under the title:

Biblical Fellowship

Biblical fellowship is more than the guys watching a sports event together or the ladies going shopping.

It's easy to get comfortable and to lose sight of what it is we're called to do.

People should come to the church and see that you long for sincere biblical fellowship.

Who would have thought that a group of people like us – as diverse as we are – would gather together, would grow together? How is this possible? Christ is how and why this is possible. He's our common bond.

Hebrews encourages us to stir up one another to love and good works and to encourage one another with a particular day in mind: the last Day: The Day that our glorious King returns for His bride, The Church. On that day can you imagine what it will be like?

Look over there...there's Tony...! And look, there's that one you had me encourage with the Scriptures...and they repented!...Thank you Lord for using me. What a privilege!"

That Day is drawing near. That Day is not so far away and we're to live *today* in light of *that* day.

Christians are called and enabled to live out their new life in Christ together.

Care group is one context where this can happen.

Let *us* draw near to God.

Let *us* hold fast to our hope,

let *us* stir up one another to love and good works,

let *us* not neglect meeting together,

and let *us* encourage one another.

Questions for discussion and application

- Read through Hebrews 10:19-25 and turn it into a prayer for you and your care group.
- How does this text point us to the gospel?
- How does the gospel call and enable us to live our lives together?
- Why is care group such a vital part of our church community?
- What does accountability look like? Who's got *your* back? Are you in the pursuit of accountability?
- When was the last time you invited someone to make an "observation" regarding an area of your life?
- When was the last time you pointed out an evidence of God's grace in someone's life?
- Describe what biblical fellowship is *not*. What is it then?
- Why might some people hesitate to pursue this kind of fellowship?
- Are you coming to church and to care group as a spectator or as a participant? How can we be better participants in both church and care group?