

10. Building Healthy Relationships in Small Group Bible Studies

In our last topic, we talked about eight purposes of small group Bible studies that are given in Acts 2:41-47. We saw that those eight purposes can be summarized by the phrase: FLOCKS that are Praying and Praising. Today, we would like to focus on how the Lord uses small group Bible studies to build healthy relationships between Christians.

When Adam sinned, it changed all of his relationships. We see that the consequences of sin:
Changed his relationship with God – there was separation – Genesis 3:8, 10
Changed his relationship with himself – there was fear – Genesis 3:10, guilt – Genesis 3:7, 11 and shame – Genesis 3:7, 10, 11
Changed his relationship with others – there was blame – Genesis 3:12

These five things – separation, fear, guilt, shame, and blame now control every person in their relationships with God and others before they become Christians. As a result, all non-Christians develop fear-based relationships. They:

1. Have relationships that are controlled by fear
2. Erect barriers between themselves and others
3. Create shells to protect their feelings
4. Develop relationships lacking trust
5. Develop relationships with little or no true communication

We received many things at the moment of salvation. Acts 26:18 alone gives us a list of five things we received at the moment of salvation. Christ told Paul that He was sending Paul to the Gentiles, “to open their eyes, *in order* to turn *them* from darkness to light, and *from* the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in Me.” In these verses, we see that salvation:

Opened our eyes

Turned us from darkness to light

Turned us from the power of Satan to God

Caused us to receive forgiveness of sins

Gave us an eternal inheritance

In addition, Christ also placed the Holy Spirit’ in our lives as the down payment and guarantee of our salvation – Ephesians 1:13-14.

These changes and others now make it possible for us to see the Lord begin reversing the effects of original sin in our lives. In a physical family, the entire family gets involved in the process of helping a new child grow and develop. The same should be true in the spiritual family. Every new Christian needs a spiritual family to help that person experience healthy spiritual growth. As we see in Acts 2:42, the Bible study and fellowship meetings provided an ideal family for the early Christians to experience healthy spiritual growth. The same should be happening today in small group Bible studies. Those small group Bible studies provide a spiritual family where each new Christian has an opportunity to experience healthy spiritual growth.

In 1 John 4:18, we read, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love.” Here, we see that love will begin to replace fear as a new Christian has a healthy environment for spiritual growth. As a result, the small group Bible study, and the spiritual family in that Bible study, provide the opportunity for a new Christian to learn how to develop love-based relationships instead of fear-based relationships. In healthy relationships:

1. Relationships are controlled by love
2. Barriers have been replaced by acceptance
3. Shells have been replaced by openness
4. Trust is a characteristic of relationships
5. Communication is direct

In our topic on Bible study and fellowship meetings, we discussed the twelve one anothers that Christians are commanded to avoid and the thirty-one one anothers that Christians are commanded to practice in their relationships with one another. The ideal place to learn how to put these things into practice is in the small group Bible study where Christians are learning to care for one another. One very practical way to put the one anothers into practice is to take one each week and take a few minutes during the Bible study to discuss how we can put that particular one another into practice in our relationships with one another during the coming week.

In Hebrews 10:24-25, we read, “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as *is* the manner of some, but exhorting *one another*, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” In these verses, we see several things that we are to do which will help us develop healthy relationships. We see that we are to:

1. Consider one another – the word translated “consider” means to *observe, understand, to consider attentively, and to fix one’s eyes or mind upon*. In this word, we see that we are to be good listeners who place our full attention on what the other person is saying so that we can understand that person clearly.
2. Stir up love in one another – here, we see that what we share should help others to have a greater love for each other and help them understand ways to share that love.
3. Stir up good works in one another – here, we see that what we share should help others to understand ways in which they can better serve one another in love.
4. Get together – we cannot help others to grow in love and good works unless we are spending time together.
5. Exhort one another – we are to share thoughts that will comfort, encourage, and strengthen one another.

Within the spiritual family (small group Bible study) we are also to help one another learn to walk in Christ. Colossians 2:6-7 says, “As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.” In these verses, we see that we are to help one another learn how to:

Walk in Christ

Become rooted in Christ

Be built up in Christ

Become established in the faith

Learn to abound in thanksgiving

These things help us to build a healthy relationship both with Christ and with one another. These things do not happen automatically. Instead, they happen as we focus on how to help one another in our spiritual growth.

In order to be able to help one another, we learn to follow the example of Christ by learning to think of others first instead of ourselves. Philippians 2:3-4 says, “*Let nothing be done* through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.” In these verses, we see that we develop healthy relationships as we:

Confess any selfish ambition or conceit to the Lord

Learn to develop lowliness of mind (have a humble opinion of ourselves)

Learn to esteem others better than ourselves (learn to think of others as better than ourselves)

Learn to not be so concerned about our own interests

Learn to become concerned about the interests of others.

As you can see, many of the things that help us to build healthy relationships with others relate to moving from pride to humility. James 4:6 says, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” A Christian who is controlled by pride is a Christian who is still controlled by fear and needs help in his or her spiritual growth. That is why every Christian needs a spiritual family that will help him in his growth, because Biblical values are exactly the opposite of the world’s values.

In Mark 10:35-45, James and John asked Christ if they could sit on His left hand and right hand. Christ reminded the disciples that, in the world, people want to exercise authority and lordship. Then, Christ said, in Mark 10:43-44, “Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be first shall be slave of all.” In these verses, we see that the way to greatness is learning to serve one another. The small group Bible study provides an ideal place to learn how to serve one another in love. In the process, those in the Bible study are also learning how to develop godly character and values.

We help Christians build healthy relationships as they learn to serve one another in love rather than being focused on their own interests. We also help them develop godly character. May the Lord richly bless you as you use Bible study and fellowship groups to help those in each group to develop healthy relationships and develop godly character.