

going deeper class

ready to run: why kingsway?



LIFE GROUPS

doing life together

"Be kind, for everyone you know is facing a great battle"

Philo of Alexandria

"All the believers were one in heart..."

Luke, in Acts 4:32

Small groups exist at Kingsway to provide authentic relationships for the life application of the CORE 4 elements of worship, grow, serve, and share

In the interest of full disclosure, I must say up front that quite a lot of this comes directly from Chapter 11 of John Eldredge's book *Waking the Dead*. That section of his book (which is a **highly** recommended read) makes such a compelling case for the necessity of small group fellowship that it's really hard for me to know how to improve upon it. So in much of this lesson, I didn't even try.

Lessons from Frodo

"The Company of the Ring shall be Nine; and the Nine Walkers shall be set against the Nine Riders that are evil. With you and your faithful servant, Gandalf will go; for this shall be his great task, and maybe the end of his labors. For the rest, they shall represent the other Free Peoples of the World: Elves, Dwarfs, and Men. Legolas shall be for the Elves; and Gimli son of Gloin for the Dwarves. They are willing to go at least to the passes of the mountains, and maybe beyond. For men you shall have Aragorn son of Arathorn, for the Ring of Isildur concerns him closely..."

"There remain two more to be found," said Elrond. "These I will consider. Of my household I may find some that it seems good for me to send." "But that will leave no place for us!" cried Pippin in dismay. "We don't want to be left behind. We want to go with Frodo." "That is because you do not understand and cannot imagine what lies ahead," said Elrond. "Neither does Frodo," said Gandalf, unexpectedly supporting Pippin. "Nor do any of us see clearly. It is true that if these hobbits understood the danger, they would not dare to go. But they would still wish to go, or wish they had dared, and be shamed and unhappy. I think, Elrond, that in this matter it would be well to trust rather to their friendship than to great wisdom"

One of the devices Eldredge makes frequent use of is the idea of mythical thinking; Mining familiar stories for deeper truths that we can then apply to life. Obviously, as a Christian allegory, there is much to be gleaned from The Lord of the Rings stories.

Q :: What can we learn from this passage that holds true for our lives today?

Q :: Are there times when we would be better served by relying on friends vs. relying on great wisdom? Explain.

Q :: Most great stories are not just about one person saving the day all by themselves. Give some examples of other stories (from books or movies) where the role of friends or companions was a vital component of the story - or necessary for the hero's success.

Honestly, though he is a very brave and true Hobbit, Frodo hasn't a chance without Sam, Merry, Pippin, Gandalf, Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli. He has no real idea what dangers and trials lie ahead. He will need his friends. And you will need yours. You must cling to those you have, you must search wide and far for those you do not yet have. You must not go alone.

Imagine you are the central heroic character in a great mythic tale. The kingdom is at war. Something stronger than fate has chosen you and given you a quest, a mission that will take you deep into the heart of the kingdom of darkness, to break down gates of bronze and cut through bars of iron so that your people might be set free from their bleak prisons. Of course, you will face many dangers; you will be hunted. - - - - Would you try and do this *alone*?

Now here's the thing: we ARE in a story – a grand story that God is writing on the pages of history. You and I, we are to play a role.

We are not merely the readers of the story, we are the characters within it. Something stronger than Fate **has** chosen you. Evil **will** hunt you. And so a Fellowship must protect you.

Q :: Do you ever see yourself as a player in a grand story God is telling? If not, why do you think that is?

Q :: How can the way in which we view ourselves, and the role we play in God's story, impact our lives – especially as it relates to our faith? And what difference would it make if we were to have a change of perspective?

Read: Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 | Acts 4:32-35 | Hebrews 10:23-25 | Matthew 18:19

Scripture is very clear that the Christian life is not meant to be lived alone. All of the “one anothers” in Scripture (things we are commanded to do for others - and again included at the end of this study) are absolutely impossible to be obedient to if we are not connected to others in a deeper and more intimate way. The “one anothers” of scripture ASSUME we are living in community and intimate fellowship.

Not only is this written in Scripture, it is written deeply on our hearts: *You must not go alone*. The Scriptures are full of such warnings, ***but until we see our desperate situation***, we hear it as an optional religious assembly for an hour on Sunday mornings. From the beginning, right there in Eden, the Enemy's strategy has relied upon a simple aim: Divide, and conquer. Get them isolated, and take them out.

Q :: Where else (in everyday life or in Scripture) do we see this tactic of the enemy at work?

Q :: Why might we be tempted to go it alone in our walk?

Q :: Tell about a time that you were greatly helped or impacted by the efforts of a group of friends.

I emphasized a phrase above for a reason. I believe we do not see ourselves in a desperate situation. For whatever reason, most of us probably just go through our day to day lives unaware that there is a great spiritual war being waged all around us, that we play a role and are often, ourselves, the focus of the battle. We are much like Luke Skywalker, who knows there's a rebellion against the evil galactic empire afoot, but he doesn't see it, it seems far way, and he's got more pressing matters of his day-to-day life on his mind. It is not until a holographic message arrives from Princess Leia (meant for Obi-Wan Kenobi) begging for help because it is “our most desperate” hour, that his larger role in the story begins to unfold.

Q :: Is our “situation desperate”? Why or why not?

Q :: Does a very real sense of the reality of an invisible spiritual war that rages, unseen, about us impact how we perceive the need for intimate fellowship with other believers?

What's it Look Like?

Eldredge talks about the essential structure of these little fellowships – or little platoons, as he also calls them:

It Must Be Small

When he left Rivendell, Frodo didn't head out with a thousand Elves. He had eight companions. Jesus didn't march around backed by legions of angels, either. He had twelve men – knuckleheads, every last one of them, but they were a band of brothers. This is the way of the kingdom of God. Though we are part of a great company, we are meant to live in little platoons. The little companies we form must be small enough for each of the members to know one another as friends and allies. It might be fun and encouraging to celebrate with a big ol' crowd of people, but who will fight for your heart? ----- *Who will fight for your heart?*

How can we offer counseling to one another, unless we actually know one another, know each other's stories? The reason counseling became a hired relationship between two people was largely because we couldn't find it anywhere else; we haven't formed the sort of small fellowships that would allow (it) to flow quite naturally. Is it possible to offer rich and penetrating words to someone you barely know, in the lobby of your church, as you dash to pick up the kids?

Q :: What other benefits come from a group being “small”?

It Must Be Intimate

Many small groups are short-lived. You can't throw a random group of people together for a twelve-week study of some kind and expect them to become intimate allies. The sort of devotion we want and need takes place within a shared life. You can do some study till you're blue in the face, and it won't heal the brokenhearted or set the captives free. We come; we learn; we leave. It is not enough. Our hearts remain buried, broken, untouched, *unknown*.

Q :: What are barriers to intimacy in small groups?

Q :: What practical things can we do to move beyond “come; learn; leave”? What ways could deeper intimacy be fostered?

It Will Be Messy

Going to church with hundreds of other people to sit and hear a sermon doesn't ask much of you. It certainly will never expose you. That's why most folks prefer it. Because community will. It will reveal where you have yet to become holy, right at the very moment you are so keenly aware of how they have yet to become holy. It will bring you close and you will be seen and you will be known and therein lies the power and therein lies the danger.

Seriously, how often have you seen deep, intimate community (the kinds that weather disappointments, hurt feelings, misunderstandings) work? It is *rare*. Because it is hard, and it is fiercely opposed. The Enemy hates this sort of thing; he knows how powerful it can be, for God and his kingdom. For our hearts. It is devastating to him. Remember divide and conquer? Most churches survive by mutual agreement that everyone keeps a polite distance from one another. We keep our meetings short, our conversations superficial. “So, Ted, how's everything going on the stewardship committee?” “Oh, just great, Nancy. We've got a big goal to reach this year, but I think we'll be able to get that gym after all.” No one is really being set free, but no one is really at odds with each other, either. We have settled for safety in numbers – a comfortable anonymous distance. An army that keeps meeting for briefings, but never breaks into platoons and goes to war.

Q :: What can we do when things get “messy” in our small groups?

It Must Be Fought For

A true community is something you will have to fight for. You'll have to fight to get one, and you'll have to fight to keep it afloat. But you fight for it like you bail out a life raft during a storm at sea. You want this thing to work. You need this thing to work. You can't ditch it and jump back on the cruise ship. This is the church; this is all you have. Without it, you'll go down. Or back to captivity.

Suddenly all those “one another's” in Scripture make sense. Love one another. Bear one another's burdens. Forgive one another. Acts of kindness become deeply meaningful because we know we are at war. Knowing full well that we are all facing battles of our own, we give one another the benefit of the doubt. That's why you must know each other's stories, know how to “read” one another. A word of encouragement can heal a wound; a choice to forgive can destroy a stronghold. You never knew your simple acts were so weighty. We check in regularly with one another, not out of paranoia (“Do you still like me?”), but in order to watch over each other's hearts. “How are you doing?”

And we need to make sure that maintain a healthy relationship with God apart from our group so that when we come together I am prepared to contribute and minister to the needs of others. I want to play a vital role.

Conclusion

I was told at a Young Life camp many years ago that you will not see any aspen trees growing off by themselves. They are created in such a way that they need the support and benefit derived from being connected to the roots of the other trees around them. Without that, they can not make and would perish on their own. I believe this is a great picture of what the Christian life should be. We need each other, and will perish if left out there on our own.

I read something interesting about aspen trees this week. The article stated: "A grove may in fact be one genetically identical organism, connected underground via roots." May that be how we grow in our small group environments - that we function as one organism, deeply connected to one another.

The "One Another's" of the New Testament

A sample listing of verse references to the Greek word ALLELOUS, translated "one another" or "each other")

"Be at peace with each other" (Mk. 9:50)
"Wash one another's feet" (John 13:14)
"Love one another" (John 13:34, & 12 other references)
"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love" (Rom. 12:10)
"Honor one another above yourselves" (Rom. 12:10)
"Live in harmony with one another" (Rom. 12:10)
"Stop passing judgment on one another" (Rom. 14:13)
"Instruct one another" (Rom. 15:14)
"Accept one another, as Christ accepted you" (Rom. 15:17)
"Greet one another with a holy kiss" (Rom. 16:16, 1 Cor. 6:20 and 2 Cor. 13:12)
"When you come together to eat, wait for each other" (1 Cor. 11:33)
"Have equal concern for each other" (1 Cor. 12:25)
"Serve one another in love" (Gal. 5:13)
"Carry each other's burdens" (Gal. 6:2)
"Be patient, bearing with one another in love" (Eph. 4:2)
"Be kind and compassionate to one another" (Eph. 4:32)
"Forgiving each other as God in Christ has forgiven you" (Eph. 4:32)
"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs" (Eph. 5:19)
"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph. 5:21)
"In humility, consider others better than yourselves" (Phil. 2:3)
"Do not lie to each other" (Col. 3:9)
"Bear with each other" (Col. 3:13)
"Forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another" (Col. 3:16)
"Teach one another" (Col. 3:16)
"Admonish one another" (Col. 3:16)
"Make your love increase and overflow for each other" (1 Thess. 3:12)
"Encourage one another" (1 Thess. 4:18, and 5:11)
"Build each other up" (1 Thess. 5:11)
"Encourage one another daily" (Heb. 3:13 and 10:25)
"Spur one another on to love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24)
"Do not slander one another" (Js. 4:11)
"Don't grumble against each other" (Js. 5:9)
"Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed" (Js. 5:16)
"Love one another deeply from the heart" (1 Pet. 1:22 & 4:8)
"Live in harmony with each other" (1 Pet. 3:8)
"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling" (1 Pet. 4:9)
"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others" (1 Pet. 4:10)
"Clothe yourselves with humility toward one another" (1 Pet. 5:5)
"Greet each other with a kiss of love" (1 Pet. 5:14)