

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 4 - LESSON 23

**Restoring The Early Church:
God's Design For His Church
The Early Church, A Tribal Culture
Man's Design: Programs And Institutionalism
Recap: God's Design For Growth In Christlikeness**



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Section 4 Lesson 23

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Restoring The Early Church *God's Design For His Church*

"[Jesus] must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets" (Acts 3:21).

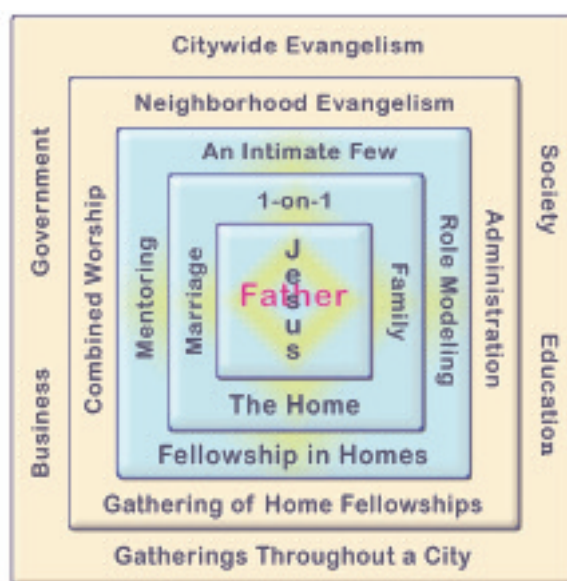
The diagram to the right represents a model of the early Church *relational priorities*. Take a moment to examine the diagram and the priorities it implies. Note that your most important relationship is in the center; the importance of relationships decreases as you go out from the center.

This diagram came about by divine revelation during the course of our research on the early Church while we were in Israel. It was as if our Father wanted to present a simplified way to convey the relational foundations upon which the earliest followers of Jesus were so *relationally intimate* and *spiritually powerful*.

The process which is embodied in the diagram begins with the intimate relationships connoted in the *center three boxes*:

- Everything in the life of a follower of Jesus flows from the quality of their *covenant relationship* with the Father.
- This covenant relationship is e-

The Restoration Diagram *Relational Priorities of the Early Church*



denced in the *loving obedience* to God's Word through His indwelling Spirit and the Christ-like character development that takes place *within their home*.

- The previous two relationships are supported by the communal righteousness and relational load-bearing of the *extended spiritual family* as they fellowship in one another's homes.

The inner three dimensions will be our focus in the lessons to follow. As these three inner relational priorities function according to God's design, they provide the foundation for all other relation-

ships.

As these relationships expand outward to the *congregational* level, a greater degree of administrative and organizational structure *may* be needed to coordinate the impact that believers in the Restoration will have in their neighborhoods, communities and beyond.

At the same time, such organizational structure, *if needed*, should enhance and encourage intimacy with our Father and Jesus, with family relationships and with those in the extended spiritual family of the home fellowship.

The outer two congregational levels may fall into the trap of promoting activity that can *detract* from the inner three priority relationships. Busyness or compensation for individuals who are irresponsible in their personal lives leads people *away from* their central three relational responsibilities. Then they're lulled into *practicing religion* in a public arena rather than walking in spiritual relationship.

You can parallel the relational progression referred to in the diagram with your own growth and development as a human being. Following your birth you began to become increasingly more aware of your connection to ever larger groups of people. Initially you were conscious of your mother, then your family and your extended family. Then your neighborhood, town and world at large started to play a larger part in your life.

When you embrace the Covenant our Father offers you in Jesus, the same relational extension reflects His biblical design. He intends that you grow in loving intimacy with Him and His Son Jesus through the working of His Spirit within you.

Remember, the word *covenant* can

mean "to live in union with". Living *in union* with your Lord is totally different than dependence on religious practice. ***To live in union*** depends on the quality of intimate relationship you have with God. The reality of your covenant union depends on the presence of the *indwelling Holy Spirit*. Neither religious form nor religious practice can bring about this union.

As you live in union with our Father through the Spirit of Christ within you, He sanctifies you, *setting you apart* for His purposes. In the process, He develops within you the fruit of "*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control*" (Galatians 5:22,23).

The first fruit listed is *love*, out of which all the others are made possible. Not only can you experience the sacrificial love which has come to you through Jesus, but you're able to impart that love to others, beginning in your own home. It's among your spouse and children (or those with whom you live) that the depth of your relationship with God is first experienced by others. If that relationship is counterfeit, they'll be the first to recognize it!

In support of the relationships within your home are the relationships with whom you share fellowship in homes. These are the *Intimate Few*, your extended spiritual family to whom you commit yourself in true, biblical fellowship.

As you'll see in a later lesson, the home fellowship was the critical facet of the earliest Church that was most severely affected by Hellenist intrusion. The introduction of clergy and pagan temples on which Christians came to rely dissolved the *interconnectedness* which had so strengthened earlier followers of Jesus.

Intergenerational nurturing took place through the extended spiritual family that gathered in one another's homes. The Hebraic home fellowship encouraged the brothers and sisters in their union with Jesus to bear fruit for the Kingdom so that the Father would be praised.

So much of Christendom today is made up of individuals and families who are connected only at the *congregational* level. They experience a disconnect in their lives between their religious practices under the steeple and their own personal lifestyle the rest of the week. This life fragmentation is a result of Hellenism and Romanism. Remember, Constantine built pagan temples for the Christians so they'd have "holy places" in which to gather *just like the heathen had*.

Think about it:

If you want the powerful foundations of the earliest Church to become *your* way of life, don't lose sight of their relational priorities: first with our Father and Jesus through His Spirit, then within your Home, and then with your extended spiritual family as you Fellowship in Homes.

Your relationship with our Father and Jesus as represented in the center of the diagram requires no organizational structure! It's out of the Father's love that Jesus has been revealed to you: "***No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him, and I will raise him up at the last day***" (John 6:44).

This relationship is *intensely personal* as your spirit yields to His Spirit. No institutional involvement will bring about within you a response to your need for Jesus. That comes only by the regenerative work of God through the Holy Spirit.

Neither structure nor organization are necessary in one-on-one relationships within your family or in your load-bearing relationships with a few others. Even the extended spiritual family of home fellowships are affiliated through *relationships of elders* in the faith community and/or through the evangelist or church planter who cultivated the groups. The Kingdom advanced because of the personal devotion to Jesus that was stimulated and spurred on by the *relational connectedness* of families bonded together through the Spirit.

When organization is kept to a minimum, you're far more likely to seek the Spirit and depend on His presence at work in each other. Fewer distractions of activity and programs arise to cause you as extended spiritual family to take your focus off serving God and His purposes.

Remember this: Jesus loves each person *individually* and *personally*. He died for each one so that each could walk in *relationship* with Him. You may have been drawn to Him for forgiveness to escape the punishment your sin deserves, and for the cleansing that enables you to have fellowship with God. But as a follower of Christ you also enter into a process. You become a *disciple*, a lifelong practice of being transformed into His image.

Jesus designed discipleship *not* as a program conducted by leaders of a congregation, but as an extension of your growing relationship with Him. He desires every believer to be in a *relationship with other believers* to enjoy true fellowship as they're discipled and as they themselves disciple others.

You may be brand new to the Kingdom, but as long as you have one hand in the Master's hand, you can reach back with the other to guide some-

one even newer along the path you've walked!

Our Lord still sees His Church as the *ekklesia*, "the called-out ones." *His people* are the Church, even the gathering of two or three in His Name. Wherever God's people are throughout the week, there is His Church, permeating society and connecting with the very people He wants His children to lead into His Kingdom.

The "called-out ones" who already have an ongoing relationship with each other are eager to gather for fellowship, communion and building up one another as they share testimony and exercise the gifts He's given them. This level of relationship, referred to in the diagram as the "intimate few" or "home fellowship", represents a seven-day-a-week commitment to each other as *family*.

This depth of care and concern signifies far more than just scheduled meetings together. It's a *mutual commitment* to uphold righteousness in your daily life and to bear one another's burdens.

The early followers of Jesus met in each others' homes as well as gathered in the temple courts for instruction. The temple courts represented the congregational assembly of the home fellowships. These people were *relational*, unified by their love for God and their commitment to each other as His people.

What is your personal view of the Restoration Diagram? What part of its relational priorities are lacking in your own life? Why are they missing?

Restoring The Early Church *The Early Church, A Tribal Culture*

"In the morning, present yourselves tribe by tribe. The tribe that the LORD takes shall come forward clan by clan; the clan that the LORD takes shall come forward family by family; and the family that the LORD takes shall come forward man by man" (Joshua 7:14).

Many are hindered from understanding the earliest Church because all they've experienced is organizational, institutional **Romanized** Christendom. The Roman indoctrination of hierarchy with intermediaries is so deeply-rooted that it's often difficult to separate the errant use of the word "church" as a *building* from its intended meaning. We *followers of Jesus* are "THE church".

As we've written previously, our research revealed that the faith practices you see in the Newer Testament were already being practiced by the Hebraic Stream of Jews. All they were awaiting was the prophesied Messiah, and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

The Hebraic believers of the earliest Church embodied relationship-based priorities that parallel the progression illustrated in our diagram. Their understanding of relationship was *tribal* in nature rather than organizational.

Tribal connection is based on relational priorities. The nation of Israel as described in the Bible was summed up by the relational progression of its parts:

1. An *individual* belonged to a *family*;
2. The family was part of a *clan*;
3. The clan identified with a *tribe*.
4. Finally, the *twelve tribes* who were ruled by their elders (and later, a king) made up the *nation* of Israel.

An elder (*zaken*) of a family who showed excellent character and good qualities of leadership could become a clan elder. Excellent clan elders would represent the clan at the tribal level. And the best of the tribal elders led the nation.

You'll remember from **Lesson 10, *Elders, Our Father's Representatives***, that an elder is an older man of wisdom who has passed through the five stages of male development and is now prepared to represent our Father in caring for His children with compassion. This is a far cry from the Hellenized version of an "elder": a young educated Phallic (*zakar*) or worldly-successful Warrior (*gibbor*) leading God's people.

We'll discuss this more in a later lesson, but let's anchor a key point about those who lead our Father's children. As you go through your Bible you'll notice how often God used the *elders* to lead the people. Moses wasn't sent back from his burning bush encounter with God to the Israelites at large, but to the elders who were the leaders of the people: "**Go, assemble the elders of Israel and say to them...**" (Exodus 3:16).

When the burden of leading the people from Egypt to Israel became too much for the prophet, God called for elders to share the responsibility:

*The LORD said to Moses: "Bring me **seventy of Israel's elders who are known to you as leaders and officials among the people**. Have them come to the Tent of Meeting, that they may stand there with you. I will come down and speak with you there, and **I will take of the Spirit that is on you and put the Spirit on them**. They will help you carry the burden of the people so that you will not have to carry it alone (Numbers 11:16,17).*

Did you notice that to represent the Father in leading His children requires the *anointing of the Holy Spirit*? Walking in reliance on the Spirit safeguards a man from leaning on his own rationalization. The character qualities Paul lists for an elder in 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 weren't developed in a vacuum! These had been esteemed and passed along for generations.

That elders in the Newer Testament were key in leading our Father's children is evident in the council gathering in Jerusalem. When the problem regarding circumcision and Torah observance was presented to the faith community at large, the leaders met privately to investigate and discuss the matter:

*On arrival in Jerusalem, [Paul, Barnabas and others] were welcomed by the Messianic community, including the emissaries and **the elders**; and they reported what God had done through them... The emissaries and **the elders met to look into this matter** (Acts 15:4,6,CJB).*

The need for elder leadership was as important for each faith community as it was for the Israelites during the Exodus. Paul instructs his evangelist protege, Titus, "*The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and **appoint elders** in every town, as I directed you*" (Titus 1:5). These older men of wisdom would be spiritual resources to help the followers of Jesus apply biblical truth to their everyday life situations.

The tribal family relationships and authority format enabled the entire nation of Israel to function in unity. This relational pattern was vital, particularly

when it came time to fight their enemies. To be victorious they needed to respond “as one man” when the war trumpet sounded.

Relational priorities bound the nation of Israel together in a network of belonging: individuals to families, families to clans, and clans to tribes.

When David was established as king over Israel, he designated fortified cities to be built all over Israel. Each city was led by *zakens*, or respected elders. Each city possessed a unique identity and experienced a certain measure of autonomy in governing itself. Each was expected, however, to respond for the good of the whole nation in time of war.

Our King Jesus, the Head of His Church, relies on the same pattern of authority and relational priorities within His Body so that His Kingdom on earth can expand.

[See our book, **Pastoring By Elders**, and **God’s Instruments For War: Discovering and Coordinating Spiritual Gifts As Weapons of Warfare**, for the importance of relational priorities in spiritual warfare.]

The Hebraic Restoration our Father is revealing today is best explained through tribal relationships. When you as an individual repent and wholeheartedly trust in Jesus, you become our Father’s child. His Spirit indwells you. Hopefully, those in your home will observe changes in your life. They may also choose to trust Jesus. (Maybe they’ve been praying for you to join *them* in trusting Jesus!)

Believers on pilgrimage need spiritual intimacy with others who come alongside them as *extended spiritual family*. In a home fellowship you can support each other’s trust in Jesus through answered

prayer and “one-anothering” (e.g., serve one another, admonish one another). Pockets of fellowship families may gather to form a congregation, which may then join other congregations of fellowships throughout the city to cooperate in endeavors to impact unbelievers at large.

The intimate, supportive relationships in your home and home fellowships are an effective mechanism to permeate your neighborhood, the businesses with which you interact, and the cultural and social sectors of your city.

The primary weapons of God’s Kingdom, as always, are: • empowerment of the Holy Spirit • obedience to the Word • intercession • prayer to tear down the enemy’s influence • the personal testimony of followers of Jesus as they reflect increasing Christ-likeness in speech and action.

Is the tribal understanding of the earliest Church new to you? Yes or No? If yes, what do you think about it?

How does it differ from your own religious experience?

**Restoring The Early Church
Man's Design:
Programs and Institutionalism**

“Woe to you, [leaders of Nicolaitanism], you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to” (Matthew 23:13).

Think of the intimacy and connect- edness as extended spiritual family that overflows Luke's description of these ear- liest followers of Jesus in the Book of Acts! Every day they had contact with each other, joyfully sharing together that which the Holy Spirit was opening up to them. And with so many entering the Kingdom every day, how needful those warm gatherings in one another's homes were to incorporate as family these newest brothers and sisters!

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts [just as they used to before proclaiming Jesus as the long-awaited Messiah]. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts [just as they always had as Jewish extended family], praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:46,47).

While we were living in Israel, our Jewish friends who were followers of Jesus asked us a penetrating question: “Why do you Christians in the United States always need an *activity* like a Bible study in order to get together? Can't you get together just because you *care about* each other?”

We were deeply convicted by their observation. During the years we minis-

tered at the retreat center and traveled North America conducting seminars on the Hebraic foundations, we'd often ask those in institutional Christendom, “How often in the past year have you invited others in your faith community into your own home purely because you wanted to spend time with them?” Only rarely did anyone raise their hand. It was sad to see how **institutionalism** dulled intimacy.

The perception of “church” as an institution or structure causes Christians to forego walking in daily dependence on God's power and guidance. The insti- tutional mentality also neutralizes the need our Lord intended for each one to commit himself deeply to other people in daily one-anothering as family. So few even see the need for their *spiritual well-being* to make the time to do so.

Institutional Christendom is **activity-based**, not relationship-based. The vast majority of people in the faith commu- nity encounter each other only because of a scheduled program—a service, Sunday school class, Bible study, or activity segregated by age, gender or life stage.

Too often American Christians are like eggs in a carton. Their shells rub against each other at services and meet- ings, but their lives never become “scrambled” in intimate relationship. Even the “cartons”, the separate congre- gations, seldom mix.

To the detriment of countless well- meaning people, the **institutionalism** that's the hallmark of the Hellenized, Romanized Christianity in the U.S. has relationally crippled many followers of Christ. The scheduled activities that put people in physical proximity dull their personal volition to develop deep inti- mate relationships. It's far too easy to

just show up at an event someone else is running rather than walk in the relational responsibility that is our Hebraic heritage!

Think about the influence that scheduled religious programs may have had on your own perception of what following Jesus is all about. Has institutionalized religious practice blunted your need for *personal, load-bearing interaction* so that it's foreign to your way of life?

Think about it. You may have committed yourself to a marriage but find it difficult to *intimately care* for the individual you married. You may participate in a specific congregation and even attend Sunday school or be part of a home group but find it almost impossible to commit yourself to other individuals in *deeply caring relationships*.

Many Christians today find themselves committed to the *effects* of believing in Jesus: being saved, having their sins forgiven, or having their prayers answered. But so few find the needful peace and power of an *ongoing daily relationship* with the person of Jesus.

Often the people we've talked with may set aside a few minutes for a little Bible reading each day, but then rush out the door to tend to the matters of "real life". The *constant awareness* of Jesus that Paul refers to in "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17) lapses into neglect.

Generally speaking, if you become a "Christian", you're told to deposit yourself into a big, impersonal organization called the "congregation". Within the vastness of the congregation you then try to find those who will care for you individually as a person. It may seem to you that relationships are a mile wide and an inch deep as people shake your

hand in welcome but then pass you by for someone else to greet.

The congregational leadership may recommend contrived groups in order for you to be involved in "church activities." Your spiritual life then comes under the control of the particular scheduled programs into which you're plugged.

Many congregations fabricate programs in the futile hope of generating closer relationships. People are partitioned into homogeneous groupings called "**affinity groups**" such as couples' clubs, youth groups, college and career fellowships. Often there is little intergenerational contact. Instead, the worldly approach of grouping by similar age or stage or interest dominates. One congregation here in Colorado Springs even advertises cell groups for those interested in dog obedience!

The delusion that guides congregational leaders who are interested in the body count of the "**church growth movement**" is that *common circumstances* will encourage interpersonal caring. In other words, if you were once an alcoholic or have been divorced, you'll find it easier to care for another alcoholic or divorced person. This is a programmatic pattern of "ministry" based on the Hellenist model of a herd mentality.

In contrast, the Hebraic paradigm would provide intergenerational relational opportunities for mentoring by the older and wiser in a family sense of spiritual kin. Followers of Jesus are nurtured through the intimacy and load-bearing of frequent contact via phone or email or visits or prayer with and for one another. Then they gather in each others' homes to share how the Spirit has been moving in their lives, and minister

to each other in the true sense of *koinonia* fellowship as family. Most programmatic groups become unnecessary!

How often have you had other people from your faith community in your home purely because you wanted to spend time with them? If this hasn't occurred, why not?

What has characterized your own experiences in trying to "become family" with others in the various faith communities of which you've been part? What would have helped you find spiritual kin among the masses?

Most Hellenized congregations no matter what size are designed around **crowd control**. Almost every facet, including the seating and aisle arrangement, is designed for orderliness in dealing with the group as a package. From a pulpit, one individual among a few select others controls the time and events which involve the majority. Even the religious edifices are constructed and laid out to control blocks of people.

Once you sit down in a pew or chair, you're under control of the performers who are following a prescribed liturgy or preplanned presentation. Some may not think their services are liturgical, but any time someone has planned ahead what will occur in the service, you have, by definition, *liturgy*. The extent of audi-

ence participation is singing, listening, and putting money into the offering.

The scriptural pattern of gathering for worship is outlined by the Apostle Paul. Note that *each person is responsible* as an interconnected part of the others to be *prepared to participate* in order to strengthen and encourage the others as spiritual family!

Whenever you come together, let everyone be ready with a psalm or a teaching or a revelation, or ready to use his gift of tongues or give an interpretation; but let everything be for edification (1 Corinthians 14:26).

Today's institutionalized approach nullifies the need for either personal preparation or interpersonal participation. Instead, the ritual of **liturgy** led by a **sacerdotal** [a human intermediary between God and man] replaces God's scriptural plan with performance and spectatorship.

In much of *man's design* for the church, even their identity as "worshippers" appears to have been lost. "In [worship's] place," notes A.W. Tozer, "has come that strange and foreign thing called the 'program.' This word has been *borrowed from the stage* and applied with sad wisdom to the type of public service which now passes for worship among us....[Even] sound Bible exposition may be carried on in such a way as to leave the hearers devoid of any true spiritual nourishment whatever. For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but *God Himself*, and unless and until the hearers find God in *personal experience* they are not the better for having heard the truth" (emphasis added).¹

Another facet noted in earlier lessons bears repeating. Institutional religion is dependent on creedal or denominational allegiance in one form or another. Many creeds and traditions incapacitate Christendom by focusing on what *divides* them rather than on unity in our Lord Jesus.

The early Church councils that followed the biblically Hebraic approach (see Acts 15) apperceived the Word of God and fostered agreement as their responses lined up with scriptural pattern.

Grievously, subsequent Hellenized/Romanized councils even to the present day employ the **win-lose methodology** of the Greek philosophers: “If we think differently, then *I* must be right and *you* are wrong. *You change* or I’m out of here!” Councils of this sort rely on the *revisionism* that lines up with cultural standards rather than apperception that establishes God’s Word for life application.

Estrangement and separation have been the fruit of this way of thinking for centuries. Often the central theme of church history has been division, hatred and murder of Christians by “Christians”, each side believing they are serving God.

Revisit the doctrines of the early Church, those matters derived from God’s Word and for which believers were willing to die. Their doctrine is summed up in their tenacity of obedient trust which counted it all joy to live and *willingly die* for the cause of Christ:

*They overcame [Satan] by the **blood of the Lamb** and by the **word of their testimony**; they **did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death** (Revelation 12:11).*

Conversely, Christendom from the time of the Greek philosophers has been filled with “**creedal traditions**” for which believers were willing to *kill or despise others*. The demonic spirits of Greece and Rome which so influence Christianity today have propagated *intolerance*, a weapon wielded by Satan to keep Christians ineffective in reaching neighbors, co-workers and cities for Christ.

From our Father’s vantage point, His children are divided for the wrong reasons. Yes, the unrepentant must be excluded from fellowship until they repent (see Matthew 18:15-17; 1 Corinthians 5:5; 1 Timothy 1:20). But the division in Christendom today pits revisionists against revisionists, each insisting on its own pet emphasis or agenda.

As the Hebraic Restoration continues, apperception of the timeless truths and intent of the Hebrew Scriptures as they are interwoven into the Newer Testament will once again become the rule for applying God’s Word among His people. Those with ears to hear will increasingly pray to understand and follow the *original intent* of the biblical writers and the Hebraic roots that so influenced them. The result will be ever-increasing unity and harmony by lovers of our Lord who deeply yearn to see Him glorified.

During our years at the retreat center (1983-1993), we witnessed the ineffectual, divisive fruit of **revisionism** and **creedal institutionalism** firsthand. Local congregations stubbornly refused to unite in face of a spiritual threat that involved the entire state.

In the late 1980’s television news reported that two thousand satanists were moving into Connecticut to “take

the state for Satan.” As small as it is, Connecticut for years was #1 in per capita income in the nation. Initially, satanism entered companies and businesses through the guise of “personal growth” seminars that incorporated eastern mysticism and meditation. For those who recognized and understood spiritual warfare, the satanic underpinning was readily apparent.

The tireless efforts of a handful of believers to warn other Christians and to mount an effectual spiritual offensive proved futile. Few would set aside their denominational differences to fight as a cohesive warfare unit in the heavenly realms. We were reminded of the Jewish people in “labor camps” during World War II who struggled in vain to awaken others inside and outside the camp to its real function as a prison of death.

As the satanic controls over these companies grew, formerly pleasant work places became oppressive. Several financially sound businesses ultimately filed for bankruptcy. The *Wall Street Journal* questioned the insolvency of one particular well-known Connecticut company. They focused on the disappearance of \$11 million of company assets at the hands of two “mysterious strangers”.

Since we had relationships with Christians from many different congregations, we encouraged them to join with other believers in their companies to intercede against the demonic takeover. “Creedal” differences, however, separated these individuals and kept them from cooperating in prayer.

Not long after this satanic plan was put into effect, the entire state entered a deep recession, with 4% of its population moving away.

When you are with others with whom you’re in fellowship, what precipitates your gathering? Would you get together if it weren’t some scheduled event or activity?

Is your faith community gathering *liturgical*, that is, preplanned according to what will happen and who will participate? Yes or No? If yes, describe it.

**Restoring The Early Church
Recap: God’s Design
For Growth In Christ-likeness**

*“Then Jesus came to them and said,
‘All authority in heaven and on earth
has been given to me.*

*Therefore go and make disciples
of all nations, baptizing them in the name of
the Father and of the Son and of the Holy
Spirit, and teaching them to obey
everything I have commanded you.*

*And surely I am with you always, to the very
end of the age”* (Matthew 28:18-20).

It’s our hope that the Hebraic Restoration will expose the source of the philosophically-constructed creedal division that now separates followers of Jesus. As more people embrace the Hebraic foundations, ever-increasing cooperation will shine among Christians in neighborhoods, workplaces, and cities

as they work in concert together for the cause of Jesus Christ.

Do you want to take active part in seeing the Kingdom of God expand? Being a “disciple maker” is the responsibility of *everyone* who claims to be a follower of Jesus. The pattern of the early Church made clear that no one should be a bystander.

The Spirit’s work in and through you may call for some big changes in your life! Philip the deacon (see Acts 5) became Philip the evangelist (see Acts 8) who led a revival in Samaria. Each and every individual, family and home fellowship family are God’s best means of permeating the godless society in which we live.

The *relational mobilization* of God’s people through personal contacts and relationships in your neighborhood, workplace and community are powerful weapons of spiritual awakening. Representing Jesus to unbelievers requires you as His follower to personally touch lives as He did and put heart and hands to the Good News you share with them.

A critical reality exists if you truly believe God’s Word to be living and powerful in the Spirit’s hands: No matter how close you draw to Jesus and to others in the faith, there will still be those you know and love (and countless others you’ve never met) who will enter a Christ-less eternity in hell because they haven’t heard the Gospel.

If our Lord could become man and die on the cross on behalf of every person, how intensely do you think He demands that *you* live to fulfill His desire and purpose, the *salvation of mankind*?

Let’s all spur each other on to loving obedience to carry out our Lord’s command to share the Gospel. Think about

the following truths as the Hebraic early Church understood them:

- The Book of Genesis makes clear that *every human being* is created in the image of God.
- Although sin ruptured our relationship with a loving Father, He graciously provided the means of *reconciliation*.
- Through the willingness of His own Son, Jesus, to lead a *sinless life and shed His blood for us*, we can have fellowship with our Father once again.
- Our loving response to His love is to be *burdened for humanity* in the same way that He is.

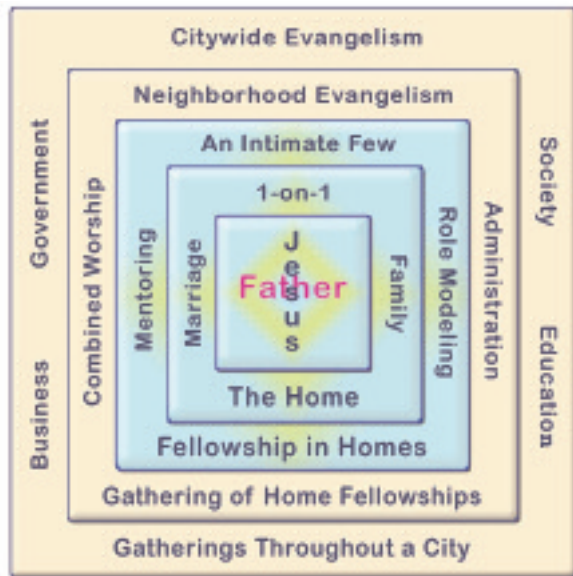
A lyric from the 1970’s can pertain to the restoration of the Church that’s now underway: “*With one hand reach out to Jesus, with the other bring a friend.*”

If you hunger for that which our Father is restoring, you can no longer identify yourself by a denomination or a “church” building. The followers of Jesus at the time of the apostles understood that *all the congregations* that met throughout a city were collectively considered “the church”: “*To the church of God in Corinth*” (1 Corinthians 1:2); “*To the church of God in Corinth, together with all the saints throughout Achaia*” (2 Corinthians 1:1); “*Phoebe, a servant of the church in Cenchrea*” (Romans 16:1).

As believers empowered by the Holy Spirit went about the daily business of life, they carried the message of Christ to all they encountered. “In the first century all church members were scattered abroad and the Church was the mission; today, the Church stays home and the apostles are scattered abroad to be missionaries...It was the method of ‘every-member evangelism’ that did the miracle in apostolic days.”²

Are *you* in the habit of bearing witness to what you have seen and heard as you go about your daily business? Describe how you do this.

The Restoration Diagram
Relational Priorities of the Early Church



The process of expansion from one to one-on-one to a few is always *personal*. Relational growth always begins from the center of the diagram, with our Father and Jesus. Your fellowship must first of all be with our Lord, then with others whom He provides for mutual strengthening and encouragement. Every extension of commitment to other people as you move toward the outer rings is based on a network of personal relationships—someone caring for you as you express care for them.

Your trust in Jesus will be strengthened only as you abide in caring relationships and experience His love that

you already know by faith through connectedness with others. As the fullness of God’s love grows in you, you’re able to share the vitality of your faith with those who have yet to encounter Jesus.

Through the intimacy of relationships in your family and in your circle of load-bearers in your home fellowship family, your awareness of the Holy Spirit’s work in you grows. The Spirit continues to fill you to be God’s vessel of blessing to others as you manifest His gifts. In that way you’re able to truly appreciate the power of belonging to a body in which everyone does his part. Equipped and empowered, you can then fulfill His commission to you and to all believers: to make disciples of all nations.

“For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.

I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back from captivity.

I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile”

(Jeremiah 29:11-14).

Jeremiah’s prophecy reminds us of the command our Lord gave us after our return from Israel in March, 1994: ***“Free the captives.”*** God plans to prosper His people in their pilgrimage toward increasing Christ-likeness and to display His glory among them. This will happen when followers of Jesus have the courage to forsake whatever hinders them and wholeheartedly seek Him with a faith

empowered by His Spirit and nourished by His Word.

Through apperceiving God's Word (returning to the original intent of the biblical writers), the Lessons which follow contain practical suggestions to acquire the powerful, cooperative faith of the early Church—a *spiritual family* built upon a Hebraic understanding of the Bible.

The priorities of our Father and Jesus, marriage and family, and home fellowship family are essential to His restoration. His people must seek the *rhema* of the Holy Spirit as did the early Church for specific guidance and direction to restore these relationships as a way of life today.

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