

# Training Manual

## *Elder Ministry*

**City Church of Chattanooga**

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# Elder Training Manual

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## **Biblical Basis for Elder Ministry**

Any ministry of the church must have a biblical justification. We can listen respectfully to ideas that come to us from man; but, although we listen with respect, we always evaluate in the light provided by divine revelation. Ultimately, commitment to any course of action must be rooted in the conviction that our choices are in harmony with revealed truth. Our goal must be to see the biblical perspective. Our commitment must be to let that perspective shape us and our ministries.

In this initial section, we will be looking at three areas: (1) the nature of leadership in the New Testament, (2) the office of elder in the New Testament, and (3) the role of the pastor in church ministry.

### **The Nature of Leadership in the New Testament**

First, it must be clearly understood that the Head of the Church is Christ. This is clearly brought out in the New Testament (Ephesians 1:22,23; 4:15; 5:23; Colossians 1:18). He is not the Head *emeritus*. He is not some nominal *chairman of the board* who is given nodding acknowledgment while others run his organization. He is not the retired *founder of the firm*. No, God has appointed Jesus “to be head over everything for the church, which is his body” (Ephesians 1:22,23).

Our struggle to understand leadership must begin with the recognition that the church is not an organization or institution. It is a living organism, and at the head of this living organism is the living Christ! In the church, we are dealing with the living Christ. We must recognize that Jesus acts in this present age as he did during biblical times and as he will in the age to come. Whatever role human leadership may play in the church, it must not intrude into the realm of Jesus’ headship or claim his prerogatives. Jesus, and Jesus alone, is the Head of the Body.

As the head, Jesus is the source and origin of our life (Ephesians 1:17-23). He sustains the whole body and supplies all we need for growth (Ephesians 4:15,16). He is the one who has committed himself to serve us and is able to bring saving transformation to our lives and to present us without stain or wrinkle or any blemish (Ephesians 5:25-29).

Leadership in the church is to be seen as *Body leadership*, not *institutional leadership*. The Apostle Paul makes this point very strongly in Ephesians 4:11-16. He points out that leaders (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers) are Christ's gifts (*doma*-- a present) to the church. These leaders are given to equip members of the Body to make their own contribution to the organism ("to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the Body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith").

The goal of church leadership is to maintain and foster the health of the Body. A healthy Body is to be understood as one that is growing in unity and love in the context of mutual ministry. Leaders must see that their primary concern is to help each believer make his own unique contribution to the Body for the maturing of all. Therefore, the picture of the New Testament leader is that of a servant, not a ruler.

#### **A. New Testament Leadership is Servant Leadership**

Jesus limits us to a leadership that finds its expression in servanthood and relies on a servant's seeming weakness. Servant-leadership is a very clear scriptural teaching. Among the places it can be seen are:

1. The nation of Israel itself is pictured as a servant (Isaiah 44:1,2). This was related to the purpose for which God chose Israel as his special people.
2. The dominant Old Testament servant figure is the Messiah. He is seen as the Anointed One who is to come to be the Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 42:1-4). In the appearance of Messiah in the New Testament, we can clearly see how Jesus fulfilled this picture. He said, "Even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve" (Mark 10:45).
3. In his teaching, Jesus taught servant-leadership as the model of leadership for his Kingdom. He stated that greatness was found in serving (Matthew 23:11). He gave a visible picture of this in the Upper Room when he washed the disciples' feet (John 13:1-17). In response to Salome's request for her sons, Jesus contrasts leadership in his Kingdom with that of the world. Worldly leadership is lordship; Kingdom leadership is servanthood (Matthew 20:25-28).

It is servant-leadership that brings the Body into a harmonious relationship and leads its members to maturity. The living Lord, as Head of the Church, will act through his servants to work out his own good will. The attitude of the servant-leader will be one of gentleness and humility. The resource of the servant-leader will be the quality of his life and the instruction of truth. The expectation of the servant-leader will be that God will act in the midst of his people.

## **B. New Testament Leadership is Team Leadership**

When the New Testament speaks of leadership, it usually speaks in the plural. Our contemporary approach that tends to exalt a single *pastor* to a lonely place at the top of the organizational chart is without biblical precedent. Instead, the Bible seems to indicate a multiple leadership team.

Team leadership is a New Testament concept. It is seen in the following:

1. Jesus sending the disciples out by two's for ministry (Mark 6:7; Luke 10:1)
2. Peter standing up "with the eleven" to preach on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14)
3. The choosing of seven men to supervise the disbursement of widows' funds (Acts 6:3-5)
4. Peter taking six brothers with him to minister at Cornelius' home (Acts 10:32; 11:12)
5. Paul's appointment of elders in each church (Acts 14:23)
6. Paul instructs Titus to appoint elders in every church in Crete (Titus 1:5)
7. The ministry to the sick is to be done by the elders of the church (James 5:14)
8. In his missionary journeys, Paul practiced team ministry by always traveling with a ministering team. (*e.g.*, Silas, Barnabas, Luke, Timothy, Titus, Apollos, John Mark, Aquilla and Priscilla, Epaphroditus, Epaphras, Tychicus, Tertius, *et.al.*)

In addition to the biblical basis of a team ministry approach to church leadership, there is a very strong practical basis as well. The following are the three most obvious practical reasons:

1. Team leadership is very effective in that it has more *manpower*. The sheer size of the work requires a sharing of leadership and ministry responsibilities for the work to be done.
2. In team leadership there is a wider diversity of spiritual gifts. No one man possesses all the spiritual gifts necessary to provide a balanced and adequate ministry to the Body.

3. A team can serve as a visual example (model) of how the Body works. One of the greatest impacts of team ministry is its corporate witness--how they work, play, study the scripture, pray, laugh, and cry together. A single leader, no matter how gifted, can only teach relational theology; he cannot model it. In team leadership differences can be shown, nonjudgmental behaviors demonstrated, and a deep love and commitment to each other can be lived out.

The nature of New Testament leadership can be summed up in the following statement:

New Testament leadership is a team of leaders who, in recognition of the Headship of Christ over the Church, seek to be servants of the Lord and his Body in order to bring the local Body of Christ to maturity, unity and mutual ministry.

## **The Office of Elder in the New Testament**

When the Apostle Paul was writing to the church in Philippi, he addressed three groups of people, “to the saints in Christ Jesus, with the bishops (elders) and deacons” (Philippians 1:1). This, along with the fact that Paul gives qualifications for both, gives indication of two offices in the church: elder and deacon.

There are two terms in the New Testament that refer to the same office. One is elder (*presbuteros*). The other is bishop or overseer (*episkopos*). One tends to refer to the office or person, while the other points to the task of the office. However, in the New Testament these terms are used interchangeably.

The office of elder is found early in the New Testament. As Paul and Barnabas were passing back through the cities of Iconoium, Lystra, and Derbe, they appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Elders of the various churches were at the Jerusalem Council in AD 50 (Acts 15:23). Paul exhorted the Ephesian Elders in Acts 20:17ff. The qualifications for elders were given by Paul to Timothy and Titus (I Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). Certain elders were to be supported for full-time ministry by the church (I Timothy 5:17,18). The sick are to call for the elders of the church to anoint them with oil and pray for their healing (James 5:14,15). Peter gives special instruction to the elders concerning their ministry to the church (I Peter 5:1-4).

Elders in the New Testament were men of spiritual maturity and integrity who were to provide leadership for the church. Their leadership was not to be viewed as administrative, but as spiritual in nature. Their objective was to minister, not administer. This is the difference between institutional leadership and Body leadership. One moves toward management and control, while the other moves toward ministry and service.

The primary role of elders is to serve as shepherd leaders. In I Peter 5:1-5 this is made very clear, “Be shepherds of God’s flock that is under your care...not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock...with humility.”

The Lord’s words to Peter in John 21:15-17 had a great influence on him that undoubtedly led to his writing this passage. Our love for Christ is not to lead us to take over the Body of which he is the Head. Our love for him is not to lead us to become managers of the Kingdom, seeking to control and protect the work of God. Instead, our love for Christ is to move us to care for the sheep, helping them to respond to the voice of Jesus, the Great Shepherd.

The eldership of City Church is not primarily an administrative board. They are spiritual ministers seeking to serve the local Body in order that the Body may grow spiritually in relationship to God and with each other. Therefore, the elders of City Church are primarily shepherds keeping watch over the congregation.

The Executive Pastoral Staff (vocational Elders) address the day-to-day ministry functions of the church. Also, Deacons serve the eldership of the church by performing tasks that free the elders to perform their biblical function.

## **The Role of the Pastor in Church Ministry**

While the New Testament clearly teaches the principle of team leadership, this does not exclude the role of a senior pastor. Every team must have a coach. This is the position in which a senior pastor stands. He is the *player coach* on the team.

It has already been shown that as the church grew the Apostles appointed men in each congregation to oversee the work. These men were the elders. In time, the ministry of the churches grew to the point that some of the elders were supported full-time by the church (I Timothy 5:17,18).

This became the early seeds of the contemporary role of the pastor. By the Second Century, most cities had a bishop with a group of elders under him in every church. These men eventually became known as *Chief Elders* or *Pastors*.

In Ephesians 4:11, Paul mentions four ministry gifts: apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastor-teachers. It is interesting to note that in giving his instructions to Timothy about the ministry of the local Body, Paul only mentions two offices: bishop (elder) and deacon. Since Paul was addressing the local church in I Timothy, he only deals with the offices of the local church. This would seem to imply that some of the offices (*i.e.*, apostle, prophet, evangelist) are broad, *whole church* ministry roles and that only the office of Elder (pastor) is a local church office.

Probably, the closest New Testament pictures of the contemporary pastor are Timothy and Titus. (Epaphras seems to possibly hold this role in the Colossian church [Colossians 1:7; 4:12].) After receiving training and practical experience from Paul, Timothy goes to Ephesus and Titus to Crete. It was here that they are given the responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the church. They were apostolic envoys, but it is clear they were elders as well. They were to appoint elders, guide the church, provide for sound doctrine, maintain order in the church, etc. As the *Chief Elders* of the church in Ephesus and Crete respectively, Timothy and Titus had special responsibilities.

The Senior Pastor (Chief Elder) is an office of great responsibility. He is the apostolic representative of the church. He has the responsibility under God that must not be discarded. He is to be the spearhead of what God is doing. This is not dictatorial power, but an obligation under God. It is a sacred trust.

The Executive Pastoral Staff is made up of the leaders of ministry departments in the church. They are, in essence, *specialized elders* who are delegated leadership in specialized ministries. Together with the Senior Pastor, they serve as Ruling Elders. They have been given the responsibility to handle the affairs of the church within the parameters set by the Church of God, the congregation, and the eldership of the church.

## Biblical Qualifications for Elder

Since leadership in the Body of Christ is not the same kind of leadership in the world, the qualifications for leadership are also different. An Elder is not a person who may happen to be a good organizer, or who has a *charismatic* personality, or is well educated. He is a man of spiritual integrity and Christian maturity. These are the distinguishing marks of qualifications for the office of Elder.

It is the quality of his life that becomes the foundation of an Elder's ministry. This is why Paul told Timothy and Titus that an elder had to be a *certain* kind of man--a man of God.

In two passages in Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus, we find a powerful profile of that *certain kind* of man who should be considered as an Elder. The following is a combined list of these spiritual qualifications:

1. Above reproach
2. Husband of one wife
3. Temperate (self-controlled)
4. Prudent
5. Respectable
6. Hospitable
7. Able to teach
8. Not addicted to any controlling substance (wine)
9. Not self-willed
10. Not quick-tempered
11. Not violent
12. Uncontentious
13. Gentle
14. Free from the love of money
15. Manages his household well
16. A good reputation with those outside the church

17. Loves what is good
18. Just
19. Devout
20. Not a new convert

The *Personal Evaluation for the Office of Elder* was developed to help an Elder evaluate himself in light of these qualifications. It is important that each Elder use this tool as a means of self-evaluation.

## **Being Filled with the Spirit**

In giving the list of qualifications for Elder, Paul did not mention that an Elder must be filled with the Spirit. Some may take this to mean that this was not an essential qualification for the office of Elder. However, this would be a wrong conclusion. Unlike today, in New Testament times, it was assumed that every believer would be filled with the Spirit. It was the exception, not the norm, for a person to be saved and not baptized with the Holy Spirit.

Jesus made it very clear that before the disciples were to begin their task of carrying out the Great Commission, they were to wait in Jerusalem until they were clothed with the power of the Holy Spirit. (Luke 24:49). The baptism in the Holy Spirit is standard equipment for any Christian desiring to minister in God's Kingdom, and this is especially true of those serving in the office of Elder.

While the Spirit-filled life begins with the objective experience of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, it is a process. In Ephesians 5:18 Paul says, "Be filled with the Spirit." The literal Greek rendering of this verse is, "Be continually being filled with the Spirit." Here we see the Spirit-filled life as one of daily submission to the Holy Spirit. Paul then gives us some often-overlooked evidences of the Spirit-filled life. These are:

1. There will be a melody in your heart (5:19)
2. You will be able to give thanks to God for all things (5:20)
3. You will have an attitude of mutual submission (5:21)
4. There will be godly family relationships (5:22-6:4)
5. There will be godly relationships in the marketplace (6:5-9)

An Elder, therefore, must be filled with the Spirit and exemplifying a Spirit-filled life as outlined in Ephesians 5:18-6:9.

## Personal Evaluation for the Office of Elder

The following questions are to help you evaluate your maturity level as a Christian and spiritual leader. It is based on the qualities stated in God's Word for spiritual leadership (Acts 1:8, I Timothy 3:1-7, Titus 1:6-9). Please circle the number that best represents your self-rating from dissatisfied (1) to satisfied (10).

1. Are you filled with the Spirit and living a Spirit-filled life?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
2. How do you evaluate your reputation as a Christian?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
3. How do you evaluate your overall relationship with your wife? If you are not married, how well are you handling sexual pressures?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
4. Is your Christian life one of self-control and discipline?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
5. Are you respectable? Is your life well adjusted, orderly, and balanced, adorning the Word of God?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
6. Are you hospitable? Do you use your home as a means of ministry to others?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
7. Are you able to teach? Do you have a readiness to communicate God's Word that arises out of your quality of life and consistent study of the Bible?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
8. Are you addicted to anything that is controlling your life? Furthermore, are you doing anything that is causing a weaker Christian to stumble and sin against God?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
9. Are you self-willed? Do you always have to have your own way?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied
10. Do you lose your temper easily? Do you harbor feelings of resentment over a period of time or are you in control of this area of your life?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    8    9    10    Satisfied

11. Are you a violent type person, one who strikes out at others because of angry feelings, or are you in control of this area of your life?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

12. Are you contentious? Do you purposely take the opposite point of view from others, stirring up arguments and destroying the unity in the group, or are you a *peacemaker* striving to create harmony and unity?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

13. Are you a mild-mannered and gentle person, reflecting meekness, forbearance, and kindness?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

14. Are you free from the love of money? Do you seek first God's Kingdom and his righteousness and practice stewardship through consistent tithing? Are you free from greed and covetousness?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

15. Do you have your household in order? Do your wife and children love and respect you and are they responding to your God and Savior and his claim on their lives?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

16. Do you have a good reputation with non-Christians? Do they respect you even though they may disagree with your religious views?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

17. Do you pursue after that which is good and right? Do you desire to associate yourself with truth, honor, and integrity?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

18. Are you just and upright? Are you able to make objective decisions and be honest in your relationship with other people?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

19. Are you pursuing personal and practical holiness?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

20. Do you hold firmly to sound doctrine? Do you accept the basic statement of faith of our church?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied

21. Are you in the process of continual growth in your Christian life, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ?

Dissatisfied 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Satisfied



## Leadership Structure of City Church of Chattanooga

Before we look at the leadership structure of our church, it will be important for us to look at the Ministry (Leadership) Gifts that Christ has placed in his Church. The key scriptural reference to this is Ephesians 4:8-16.

There has been much discussion concerning this passage as it relates to the ministry of the local church. Differences of opinion abound. Therefore, it is not our goal here to speak dogmatically on this subject. What we want to do is take an honest look at this passage in light of where we are as a church and in light of where God is leading us as a local body of believers.

### Ministry Gifts of Christ to His Church

Unlike the *motivational gifts* in Romans 12:3-8, and the *manifestation gifts* in I Corinthians 12:1-11, the Ministry Gifts are not gifts that Christ gives to individual Christians. Instead, they are *gifted leaders* Christ has given to his Church.

The Greek word for *gifts* in Ephesians 4:8 carries the idea of *a present*. We are to view the offices of Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, and Pastor-Teacher as Christ's *presents* to his Church.

In verses 12-16, we see the purpose for which Christ has given these *presents*. Those called to these ministry responsibilities are to:

1. Equip the saints to do the work of the ministry (12a).
2. Build up the Body of Christ (12b).
3. Bring unity to the Body of Christ (13a).
4. Bring the Body of Christ to maturity (13b, 14a).
5. Bring the Body of Christ into Christ likeness (13c).
6. Produce doctrinal stability in the Body (14b, 15a).
7. Help the Body grow in all aspects of service unto Christ as each part of the Body fulfills its function.

## Specific Functions of the Four-Fold Ministry Gifts

A careful study of the Greek text of Ephesians 4:11 indicates that there are four ministry gifts, not five. These are: Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, and Pastor-Teacher. The responsibility of pastoring and teaching are grouped together in such a way as to suggest that the two roles are regarded as complementary and coordinated in the same person. In order to help us understand the function of these ministry gifts, let us look at them individually.

### A. Apostles

Some would argue that the office of Apostle was limited to the Twelve, and in one sense, they are correct. The original Apostles were the *Apostles of Christ*. They were chosen by Christ and had to have seen him after his resurrection (Acts 1:21,22). These men, along with the prophets, formed the foundation of the Church (Ephesians 2:20). It was through these men that God gave us the New Testament Scriptures. There is not the slightest New Testament evidence, nor is there evidence from the history of the Church immediately following the First Century, for an apostolic succession. There are no other *Apostles of Christ*.

On the other hand, there are still Apostles in the church today. These are the *Apostles of the Church*, and this is the intention of Paul in Ephesians 4:11.

The word *Apostle* comes from the Greek word *apostolos*. It means “one who is sent as an authoritative delegate, representing the one who sent him.” In this sense, Christ is called an apostle in Hebrews 3:1. We also find in the New Testament men who were *Apostles of the Church*. These are Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Andronicus and Junias (Romans 16:7), and Epaphroditus (Philippians 2:25).

An Apostle has a broad ministry role. His ministry is general and universal rather than locally based. He is one gifted by Christ and authorized by the Church to have a supervisory role over the church. He appoints the pastoral leader of the local churches and guards the foundation of the Church.

In the Church of God, the apostolic function is filled by the Overseers whom God has raised up within the denomination.

## **B. Prophets**

Not only do many teach that there are no Apostles today, they also teach that there are no Prophets. However, this seems to be in direct contradiction to Ephesians 4:11. If the body of Christ is still in need of being equipped for ministry, growing to maturity and Christ likeness, etc., then there is still the need for the ministry of the Prophet.

The obvious questions that arise are: What is the role of a Prophet? Who are the Prophets in the church today? To answer the first question let us look at where we see Prophets in the Early Church.

1. Acts 1:27,28: Several Prophets from Jerusalem go to Antioch; one of them, Agabus, predicts a severe famine.
2. Acts 13:1: Certain Prophets and teachers are named as being in the church at Antioch. These were Barnabas, Simeon, Lucious Manaen, and Saul.
3. Acts 15:32: Two brethren, Judas and Silas, Prophets from Jerusalem, encouraged and strengthened the brothers in Antioch.
4. Acts 21:9: Philip, the Evangelist, had four daughters who were Prophetesses.
5. I Corinthians 12:28: Prophets are listed here as one of the ministry gifts Christ has placed in the Church.

The word *prophet* comes from the Greek work *prophetes*, which means “one who speaks forth or openly, a divinely inspired oracle.” It was through Prophets that God brought to us the Old Testament Scriptures (II Peter 1:21), and they, with the Apostles of Christ, were anointed by the Spirit to bring to us the New Testament.

Today, a Prophet does not bring a *new revelation*, for the Canon of Scripture is complete and we have no authority to add to nor take away from it (Revelation 22:18,19). The role of the Prophet today is to boldly speak forth the revelation of Scripture to the Body of Christ. Gifts of revelation (*i.e.*, word of knowledge, word of wisdom, discerning of spirits) and gifts of inspiration (prophecy, tongues, interpretation of tongues) are very common accompaniments of the ministry of the Prophet. However, all such revelations and inspirations must be solely founded on Scripture and

evaluated by Scripture. Because of the nature of the gift, the ministry of the Prophet is probably most liable to abuse. This is why the Prophet must be accountable to the Body of Christ and prophetic messages must be discerned carefully (I Corinthians 12:3; 14:29; I John 4:1).

Like the Apostle, the ministry of the Prophet was more general and universal in scope. In the Early Church, Prophets were wanderers--itinerant proclaimers of Divine Truth. Their task was one of stimulating and stirring the Church. The emphasis of their message was the holiness of God. They taught a more noble way of living, and they called for repentance, renewal, revival, and commitment. Their ministry was to edify (strengthen), encourage (exhort, incite, stimulate), and console (comfort) (I Corinthians 14:3). The effect of the Prophet's ministry on an unbeliever was the revelation of the secrets of his heart, which led to conviction and true repentance (I Corinthians 14:24,25).

To answer the second question as to who the Prophets are today, we must discern whom the Lord has raised up in his Body that are fulfilling the preceding described functions. On a very large scale, some names that come to mind are: Pat Roberson, James Robison, and David Wilkerson. In the same manner, many so-called Evangelists are not evangelists, but Prophets who travel from place to place stirring the Church and calling for revival. Some Prophets are called by the Lord to *pastor* established churches for a brief time in order to correct sinful patterns, reestablish righteousness, and restore spiritual life.

### **C. Evangelists**

The current concept of an Evangelist as a revivalist and a promoter of religious interest within the organized church is not the view of the Evangelist of the New Testament days. As already shown, many of today's *Evangelists* are, in fact, prophets.

The word *evangelist* comes from the Greek word *euangelistes*. It means "one who announces the good news (Gospel)." An Evangelist is one whose primary ministry is to the world, not to the Church. He proclaims the Gospel to the unconverted in order that they might receive salvation and become part of the Church. His task is that of a missionary, whether at home or abroad, bringing the lost to Christ. The power or sign gifts very often accompany the ministry of an Evangelist. He either establishes local churches for those receiving salvation or increases established churches by the addition of new converts.

An Evangelist is not confined to one location, but, like the Prophet, has an itinerant ministry. Once people are converted to Christ, the work of the Evangelist gives way to the ministry of the Pastor-Teacher.

We can see the ministry of the Evangelist in the ministry of the one man who is specifically called an Evangelist in the New Testament--Philip (Acts 21:8). Here is what we note of his ministry:

1. He was a proclaimer of the *good news* to the unconverted (Acts 8:5).
2. His ministry was accompanied by signs and wonders (Acts 8:6,7).
3. He did not establish the church, but left this in the hands of the Apostles, leaving when his work of proclaiming was finished (Acts 8:14,26,27).
4. His ministry was not only to the multitudes, but also to unbelievers wherever he found them (Acts 8:26-29).
5. He did not remain in one location, but traveled from city to city proclaiming the Gospel and founding local churches (Acts 8:40).

Today, missionaries minister in the role of the Evangelist. Church planters are also Evangelists. In addition, there are gifted leaders whose primary focus of ministry is to the world. An obvious evangelist is Billy Graham. There are many believers God has called and given to the Body of Christ who stand in the office of Evangelist, bringing the *lost* to Christ.

#### **D. Pastor-Teachers**

In the New Testament, as the Church grew, the Apostles appointed men in each congregation to oversee the spiritual ministry of the local churches. These men were the Elders. It is important to understand that the term *elder*, *overseer*, and *pastor* are used interchangeably in the New Testament.

The word *pastor* is the translation of the Greek word *poimen* and literally means “a shepherd of a flock.” The responsibility of a shepherd is to *tend* the flock. Tending the flock involves guiding, feeding, defending, protecting, and exercising oversight. It requires tender care and vigilant supervision.

Unlike the other three ministry gifts, the center of the Pastor-Teacher’s ministry activity is the local church. A Pastor-Teacher is one whom God has called to assume a long-term responsibility for

the spiritual welfare of a group of believers in a local church. Being appointed by those in the apostolic office, the Pastor-Teacher represents apostolic authority in the local church.

To better understand the local church focus of the Pastor-Teacher, it is interesting to note that when Paul wrote to and about local church leadership, the only office he addressed was the pastoral one--Elder. No mention is ever given to the qualification of Apostles, Prophets, and Evangelists, only Elders (pastors). The obvious reason for this is that Paul was speaking to local church issues, and the only ministry gift that is specifically centered in the local church is that of Pastor-Teacher.

In summary, God has made an extraordinary gift to the Church by giving the Church gifted leaders--Apostles (the superintending office), Prophets (the stirring office), Evangelists (the reaching office), and Pastor Teachers (the shepherding office). Without the ministry of these offices fully function within the Body of Christ, the Church will never benefit from the full ministry of Christ who himself embodies all of these.

## **Leadership Structure of City Church**

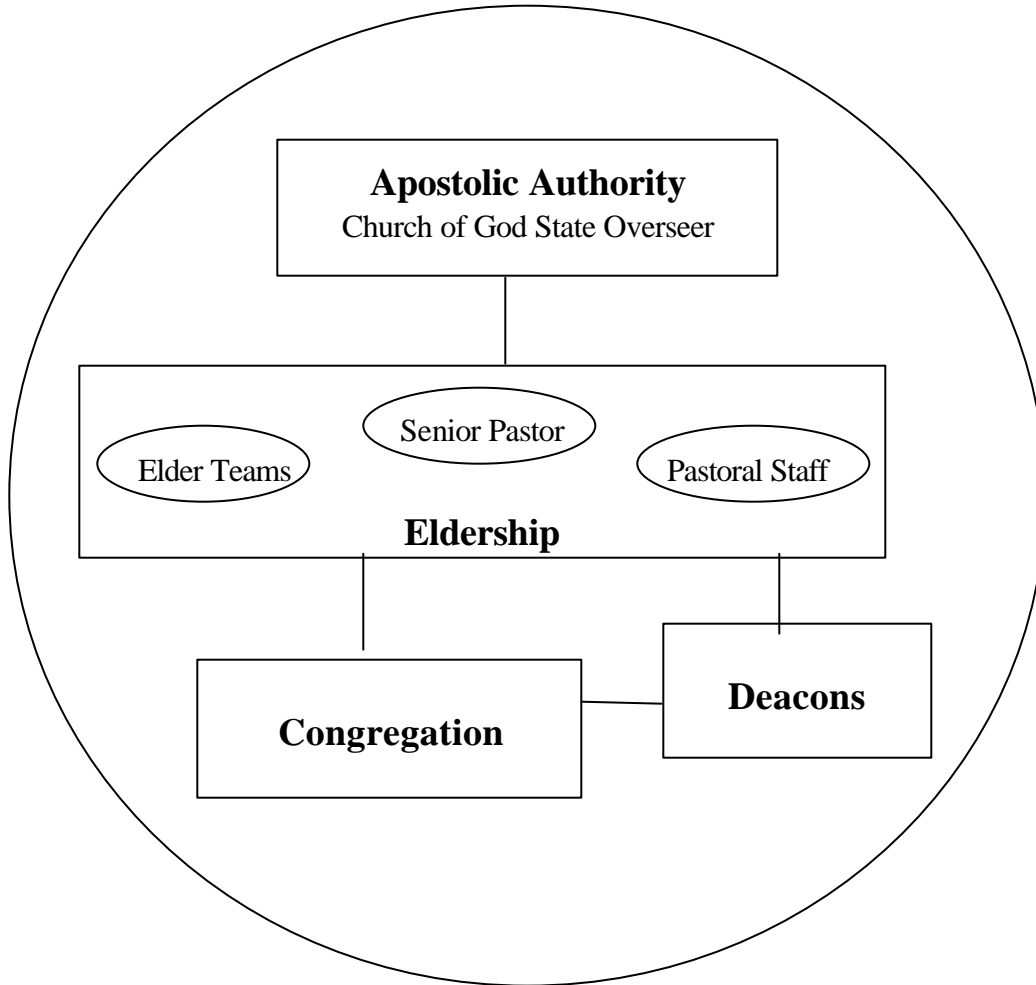
In an attempt to follow the leadership principles of the New Testament, there are three primary groups that form the leadership team of our local church:

1. Executive Pastoral Staff: This leadership group is made up of the Senior Pastor and the ministry heads of our church. These pastors stand in the role of Ruling Elders who have the responsibility to make the day-to-day ministry decisions within the parameters of authority given to them, first and foremost, by Holy Scripture and, second, as expressed by the Church of God and this local Body.
2. Elder Teams: This leadership group (made up of Elders and their wives) serves in the pastoral office with six functions: (1) to guard sound doctrine, (2) to provide spiritual ministry to the Body, (3) to serve as examples to the Body, (4) to administer church discipline, (5) to serve as advisors to the Executive Pastoral Staff, and (6) to provide for the practice of New Testament fellowship.
3. Deacons: Under the authority of the eldership, this leadership group serves as the stewards of the church treasury. They are elected by the Body to make decisions

concerning the disbursements from the church treasury and the maintenance of all church assets. Deacons manage the church budget as approved by the Elders.

The following diagram helps illustrate the leadership structure and ministry of our church:

## Headship of Jesus Christ



# Guarding Sound Doctrine

One of the primary tasks of Elders (both Ruling and Ministering) is to guard sound doctrine. While the move today has been to down play doctrine, we as a church must see sound doctrine as a trust given to us by god.

It is really a mistake to think that one can down play doctrine. Everyone has a doctrine. Our whole system of faith and life is based on some system of doctrine. This is why Paul told Timothy to “watch his life and doctrine closely . . . because, if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (I Timothy 4:16).

## What is Sound Doctrine?

Exactly what are we to guard? All of us will have to admit that no two Christians see everything alike with respect to the teaching of the Bible. This is one of the reasons we have so many denominations in existence. Even within one denominational fellowship or local church, there will be differences of biblical interpretation.

Sound doctrine does not mean that we have come up with an exact and accurate interpretation of every biblical text, that we have codified this interpretation into a system of theology, and that we brand as heretic anyone who disagrees. On the contrary, guarding sound doctrine means that we recognize our own fallibility and the subjective element of biblical interpretation. At the same time, it holds to the following guiding principles:

1. God has revealed himself and his will through his inspired Word, which is infallible.
2. The Holy Spirit is the illuminator of divine truth.
3. No scripture is of private interpretation.
4. The path to understanding sound doctrine takes us from the contemporary setting through almost 2000 years of church history back to the original manuscripts themselves.
5. There are scriptural interpretations necessary for salvation and spiritual growth and those that are not.

Guarding sound doctrine means that our church has established a foundational statement about which we are dogmatic. We consider this statement fundamental to faith. As part of the Church of God, our statement of faith is evangelical, conservative, and Pentecostal. It is expressed in the fourteen statements in the Church of God *Declaration of Faith*:

We believe . . .

1. In the verbal inspiration of the Bible.
2. In one God, eternally existing in three persons; namely, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.
3. That Jesus Christ is the only begotten Son of the Father, conceived of the Holy Spirit, and born of the Virgin Mary. That Jesus was crucified, buried, and raised from the dead. That he ascended to heaven and is today at the right hand of the Father as the Intercessor.
4. That all have sinned and come short of the glory of God and that repentance is commanded of God for all and necessary for the forgiveness of sins.
5. That justification, regeneration, and the new birth are wrought by faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.
6. In sanctification subsequent to the new birth, through faith in the blood of Christ; through the Word and by the Holy Spirit.
7. Holiness to be God's standard of living for his people.
8. In the baptism with the Holy Spirit subsequent to a clean heart.
9. In speaking with other tongues as the Spirit gives the utterance and that it is the initial evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit.
10. In water baptism by immersion, and all who repent should be baptized in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.
11. Divine healing is provided for all in the atonement.
12. In the Lord's Supper and washing of the saints' feet.
13. In the premillennial second coming of Jesus. First, to resurrect the righteous dead and to catch away the living saints to him in the air. Second, to reign on earth for a thousand years.
14. In the bodily resurrection; eternal life for the righteous, and eternal punishment for the wicked.

Also, understanding that our commitment is to Jesus Christ and to the keeping of his commandments, we pledge ourselves, with God's help, to strive for the scriptural standard in each of the following areas:

1. **Spiritual Example**

We will demonstrate our commitment to Christ through our practice of the spiritual disciplines; we will demonstrate our commitment to the Body of Christ through our loyalty to his Church; and we will demonstrate our commitment to the work of Christ through our being good stewards.

2. **Moral Purity**

We will engage only in those activities that glorify God in our bodies and avoid the fulfillment of the lust of the flesh. We will read, watch, and listen to only those things that are of positive benefit to our spiritual well being.

3. **Personal Integrity**

We will live in a manner that inspires trust and confidence, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, and seeking to manifest the character of Christ in all our behavior.

4. **Family Responsibility**

We will give priority to fulfilling family responsibilities, to preserving the sanctity of marriage, and to maintaining divine order in the home.

5. **Behavioral Temperance**

We will practice temperance in behavior and seek to avoid activities and attitudes that are offensive to our fellow man or that lead to addiction or enslavement.

6. **Modest Appearance**

We will demonstrate the scriptural principal of modesty by appearing and dressing in a manner that will enhance our Christian testimony and avoid pride, elaborateness, or sensuality.

7. **Social Obligation**

We will fulfill our obligations to society by being good citizens, by correcting social injustices, and by protecting the sanctity of life.

## **Why Guard Sound Doctrine?**

To answer this question let us look at the two main scriptures that admonish Elders to do so: Acts 20:28-31 and Titus 1:9.

In Acts 20:28-31, Paul is giving his final instructions and farewell address to the Ephesian Elders. First, he reminds them that they have been placed in their position by the Holy Spirit to guard the flock (church). Second, he warns them that savage wolves (false teachers) would come among them and distort the truth. Therefore, they must be on their guard to protect the church from such unsound teaching.

It is obvious that the New Testament addressed the matter of false teachers and false doctrine in a very straightforward manner. We are also told that such deception will continue and become even more prevalent until the coming of Christ (I Timothy 4:1-6; II Timothy 4:3-4; Romans 16:17-18; II Corinthians 11:13-15; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 4:1). The life of the Body of Christ is dependent on the soundness of the doctrine it receives.

Titus 1:9 states that doctrinal fitness is a qualification for an Elder. He must be able to hold to the “trustworthy message” despite the winds of false teaching. This doctrinal stability will give him a standing ability to perform a two-fold task: (1) to encourage others by sound teaching, and (2) to refute those who oppose sound doctrine.

## **How to Guard Sound Doctrine**

The method used by the Elders of our church will center around three focal points. These are (1) alertness, (2) instruction, and (3) correction. Paul told the Ephesian Elders to “be on your guard.” We too must follow such an admonition. We must have an alertness that comes from our own consistent study of the scriptures and sensitivity to the Holy Spirit. We must avoid the two extremes of gullibility and skepticism, but be alert and aware of anything that smacks of false teaching.

Prevention is much better than cure; therefore, instruction in sound doctrine in all phases of church life is important. We must not shrink back from proclaiming and teaching the whole counsel of God.

Finally, correcting may be required. If a message (either through a proclamation or an inspired utterance) goes forth to the local Body and it is deemed to be contrary to sound doctrine, it is the

responsibility of the elders to humbly, yet clearly correct the one giving such a message. If the message was given publicly, the correction and explanation, in love, must be given publicly.

## **Administering Church Discipline**

Of all the tasks given to the Elders of the Church, the administration of church discipline is probably the most difficult. Because it is such a difficult task, most churches do not even attempt to follow the biblical principles concerning this matter. However, while our local Body has not been perfect in this matter, we do attempt to be faithful in our responsibility to be obedient to Christ, our Head.

The needs that give rise to the practice of church discipline are three-fold: (1) reconciliation, (2) restoration, and (3) purity. Let us look at these individually.

### **Reconciliation**

Reconciliation implies that there has been a breach in a relationship due to an offense. Because of our sinful natures, there will arise occasions when an offense may occur among believers. The principle of reconciliation/discipline states that interpersonal problems between Christians must be solved. This principle puts an end to loose ends in Christian relationships. Loose ends are those interpersonal problems between Christians that remain unresolved.

Unresolved problems hurt everyone and dishonor Christ's name. This is why God insists that every personal difficulty be resolved by either reconciliation or discipline. Unreconciled relationships constitute *emergency priorities* that may not be handled casually or at one's leisure (Matthew 5:21-26).

This need (reconciliation) is in view in one of the definitive passages on church discipline in the New Testament: Matthew 18:15-20. It is also addressed in Paul's admonition against believers suing each other in secular courts. He sees it as the church's responsibility to reconcile such differences (I Corinthians 6:1-6).

### **Restoration**

Church discipline also is designed to meet the need of an erring brother or sister. The restoration of such a one to fellowship with God and to fellowship with the Body is the purpose of church discipline.

An understanding of this can be gained by looking at Galatians 6:1-2. Our ministry toward one of the Body who is “caught in a sin” is that of restoration. This restoration is to be done by “you who are spiritual.” The “spiritual” is a person who is mature in the ways of the Lord. He is one whose standard of measurement is scripture. The word *restore* pictures the setting of a broken bone or the mending of broken nets. In other words, the purpose of church discipline is restoration, not revenge. It is for mending wounds, not exposing them.

However, there are situations when the offer of restoration will not be received by the erring party, and then subsequent measures must be taken even to the point of excommunication. Yet, even in excommunication, the goal is restoration. This can be seen in I Corinthians 5:5 and I Timothy 1:20. It is obvious that even severe church discipline, when administered in love and in obedience to the methods of scripture, worked. The man of I Corinthians 5 is undoubtedly the restored man of II Corinthians 2:5-11.

## **Purity**

A third purpose of church discipline, that must not be ignored, is that of purity. Church discipline is done also to honor God’s name and to assure the purity of the Church (I Corinthians 5:6-7). Habitual sin, of which there is no repentance, robs the Body of its witness and the believer of his peace.

If after following the biblical patterns of church discipline, excommunication from the fellowship still becomes necessary, it should be done with great sorrow (I Corinthians 5:2). The welfare of the church is not served by selfishly eliminating people with a *good riddance* attitude. The church must always keep in view the hope and possibility of the restoration of the excommunicated member.

## **Biblical Procedures of Church Discipline**

Matthew 18:15-20 and I Corinthians 5:1-13 give us the biblical procedures that are to be followed if church discipline. It must be our intention to follow these procedures as closely as we know how.

The first step is the *private step*. Here a person (either the offended party or an Elder representing the church) goes to the offending brother/sister privately. This confrontation is not to

expose his/her sin, but to seek repentance and restoration. This may not mean just one visit, but every possible attempt must be made to resolve the matter at this stage.

The *private step* is the most abused and forgotten step of all. The vast majority of all problem situations could be successfully concluded if this step was not ignored. For this reason, our Elders will not take any further action when problematic situations arise until this step has been taken.

If, however, every attempt has been made to conclude a matter at the first step and there has been no success, the second step is the *group step*. Here two or three people, at least one of which should be an Elder, are brought into the situation. They are to serve as arbitrators or counselors who try to persuade the brother/sister to be reconciled. They too must work at this until they have achieved reconciliation or are convinced that they have done all that is possible for them to do, to no avail.

Reluctantly, at this point those involved in the *group step* become witnesses, and the whole matter moves to step three, the *corporate step*. This step is the final one and seeks to end the matter--to tie up all loose ends. The church, acting through its Elders, seeks to bring restoration and reconciliation. Yet, if they too fail after exhausting every means, the sinning and unrepentant person must be disciplined, and this may include excommunication. Excommunication means that someone is viewed as an unrepentant sinner and, therefore, not part of the Church.

## **The Presence and Authority of Christ in Church Discipline**

Of great importance is the fact that the authority of Christ is given to the church discipline process when it is carried out according to biblical principles. This is reflected in the use of the phrases “come together in my name” (Matthew 18:20)f and “assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus” (I Corinthians 5:4). It is only through this authority that the Church is able to “bind and loose” (Matthew 18:18)f and to “hand one over to Satan” (I Corinthians 5:5).

Also, when church discipline is administered according to biblical guidelines, the presence of Christ is assured in the process. The promise, “there I am with them,” has been often quoted in the context of a worship service when, in fact, it is in the context of church discipline. This is obviously what Paul had in mind when he said, “the power of the Lord Jesus is present” (I Corinthians 5:4).

## Providing Spiritual Care

This task of the Ministering Elder Teams is the most important one of all. It is only through the work of our Elders that we are able to provide adequate pastoral care to every person in our congregation.

The role of the Elder is referred to in the New Testament as that of a shepherd to a flock (I Peter 5:2; Acts 20:28). The various functions of a shepherd are to:

1. **Guard**

He is to be a watchman, insuring that no predator is allowed near the sheepfold. He is also to be watchful in case a wayward sheep should slip away from the flock.

2. **Guide**

Without a guide, sheep will wander off in all directions and eventually die. The shepherd must lead his sheep in the right direction.

3. **Rescue**

Despite the best efforts of the shepherd, there will still be sheep that leave the safety of the sheepfold and fall into danger. It is then that the shepherd goes out and seeks the lost sheep and rescues it.

4. **Heal**

Sick and injured sheep must have the loving care of the shepherd in order to get well.

5. **Feed**

Sheep do not have the natural ability to find food on their own. Without the care of the shepherd, they will starve. The shepherd must lead them away from the polluted streams and barren pastures to the nourishing food and water.

6. **Love**

The good shepherd loves his sheep and is willing to lay down his life for them. In return, they will know his voice and follow him wherever he leads them.

## **The Role of Pastoral Care**

Pastoral care centers around four responsibilities: (1) healing, (2) sustaining, (3) guiding, and (4) reconciling. It is through these four functions that the Elders will provide spiritual ministry to our local Body.

Healing is helping a debilitated person be restored to wholeness and to achieve a new level of spiritual insight. We must not limit our understanding of healing simply to the physical. Healing is a full faceted ministry that includes spiritual healing, emotional healing, relationship healing, deliverance healing, as well as physical healing. The key word in the ministry of healing is *wholeness*, which touches every area of one's life.

Sustaining is helping hurting people endure and transcend painful circumstances. Sustaining also is a ministry that helps individuals experience spiritual growth through perseverance.

Guiding is assisting persons in making confident choices when such choices are viewed as affecting the present and the future state of the soul. Being able to provide sound biblical counsel is important in this function.

Reconciling is seeking to reestablish broken relationships between man and fellow man as well as between man and God. Reconciliation is a change of relationship between persons that will involve at least three elements: (1) confession of sin, (2) forgiveness, and (3) the establishment of a new relationship between the persons. In reconciliation, enmity and alienation are replaced by peace and fellowship.

## **Specific Tasks in Providing Spiritual Care**

In order to fulfill the four responsibilities of pastoral care, the Elder Teams will be involved in a variety of ministry activities. It is very important that these tasks be conscientiously performed.

The first task has to do with ministering in church worship services. The congregation will be looking to the Elder Teams for prayer. This will include prayer, the laying on of hands, anointing with oil, and brief words of counsel, encouragement, and empathy. The key attitude of the Elder Team is compassion and faith.

Another important task of the Elder Teams is visitation. There will be times when a person is in the hospital or at home sick. It is then that a meaningful visit will be necessary. In addition to the regular visitation of the Minister of Pastoral Care, Elder Teams must be involved.

Counseling and advice is also important. God has placed the Elder Teams in a very important position of guidance if the lives of our congregation. Your counsel should be offered strictly as biblical counseling, not psychological counseling. Should a problem seem beyond the scope of an Elder's ability, referral to the Minister of Counseling or the Senior Pastor may be needed. However, even in such cases, the Elder Team will still be involved in a meaningful way in the ministry.

Elder Teams will also be involved in intervention ministry. This particular task is both corrective and restorative. Intervention may occur when there are crucial situations that exist in the lives of certain members of the Body who, without such ministry, will be headed for great peril. Intervention may be called for in such cases as severe marital conflict, financial crisis, strained interpersonal relationships, etc. When there are situations requiring intervention, these should be a cooperative effort of the Elder Team and/or the Senior Pastor, the Minister of Counseling, or the Minister of Pastoral Care.

Recognizing when a person is in need of encouragement is also important. The Elder Team must be alert to notice when one in their group seems to be discouraged or under a heavy burden. This can be seen particularly when church attendance becomes sporadic. Such an occurrence should not be overlooked, but is usually a sign that special attention needs to be given to the person.

## **Regular Contact Is Important**

In a church our size it is very easy for people to get lost in the crowd. When they are absent from church meetings, not one notices. This can lead to feelings of alienation and that no one cares. Although there is no way we can totally prevent such unfortunate situations, we should seek to lessen their frequency of occurrence.

One of the ways to do this is by seeking to maintain frequent contact with those in your group. Periodic telephone calls and cards on special occasions are good ways of doing this. These types of contact let a person know that they are loved and have a place where they belong.

*The Ministry Network*, through the ministry of Caregivers and HOME Pastors, provides regular contact and ministry to the congregation. The efficient Elder Team will work together as a team with their Caregivers and HOME Pastors.

The Elder Teams of our church are the *heart* of the Body. When the Elders care, life is pumped into the Body. Christ's love, demonstrated through the Elders' care, catalyzes the entire church and prepares us to serve Christ in love and compassion.

## **Building Fellowship**

The very first account of the New Testament Church highlights the importance of fellowship. Luke states that they “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer” (Acts 2:42). They did not just “have fellowship” they *devoted* themselves to it. They gave it a priority in their lives along with prayer and teaching.

Fellowship, as described for us in the New Testament, is much more than a Christian social activity. This does not mean there is no place for such activities. They may, if entered into for this purpose, contribute to fellowship, but in and of themselves they are not fellowship.

The Greek word for fellowship is *koinonia*. It conveys two related meanings: (1) to share together, and (2) to share with.

### **Sharing Together**

To share together in the sense of a joint participation refers primarily to a relationship that believers have together in Christ. Through this, we understand that fellowship is a relationship, not an activity. It is a recognition of a community-relationship that exists among those who have trusted Christ.

Koinonia also implies a partnership. A partnership is two or more people who have joined together in order to attain a certain objective. Biblical fellowship is an active partnership of a community of believers formed to glorify God, promote the Gospel, and build up believers.

### **Sharing With**

*Sharing with*, first of all, carries the idea of communicating with one another on a close personal and spiritual level. If we are to regain the New Testament concept of fellowship, we must learn to get beyond the temporal issues of the day and begin to share with each other on a level that will enhance our spiritual relationship with one another and with God.

In the Early Church, however, we see that they did not limit their concept of koinonia to only communication. They also shared their material possessions with those in need (Acts 2:44-45).

Sharing our possessions with one another should be a natural consequence of our realization that biblical fellowship denotes both a relationship *and* a partnership.

## **Enhancing Fellowship Within the Body**

Within each Elder Group, it will be necessary to work toward the enhancement of fellowship. This can be done through the following means:

1. The building of warm relationships within the group.
2. The fellowship aspect of Covenant Discipleship Groups (CDG).
3. An active Caregiver ministry
4. Encouraging members to participate in a HOME Group.
5. The monthly Koinonia gathering (social meetings).
6. Reaching out in practical ministry to those within the group who are in need (finances, food, etc.)

In a growing fellowship such as ours, it is very easy for a person to join the church and then be lost in the crowd. We must assist them--sometimes gently nudge them--to become involved in the life of the Body. We can do this by encouraging them to come to the functions that allow relationships to be built (CDGs, HOME Groups and Koinonia meetings), by introducing new members to those in the group, and by giving them opportunities to minister to others in the group.

## **Caregivers**

Each Elder Team will select Caregivers from their CDG to serve in ministry with them. Ideally, there should be one Caregiver for every five to seven households. A Caregiver is exactly what the name implies, a person who gives spiritual care to another.

The responsibility of the Caregiver is to:

Fulfill the four-fold commitment to caregiving

1. Pray regularly for each person in the Care Group.
2. Be available to those in the Care Group.
3. Contact each home at least once a month.

4. Provide a Christian example.

Keep the Elder Team informed of any special needs within the Care Group.

Contact a church prospect (per Elder Team request) with an invitation to attend the CDG.

Be accountable to the Elder Team by turning in a monthly report on the first Sunday of the month.

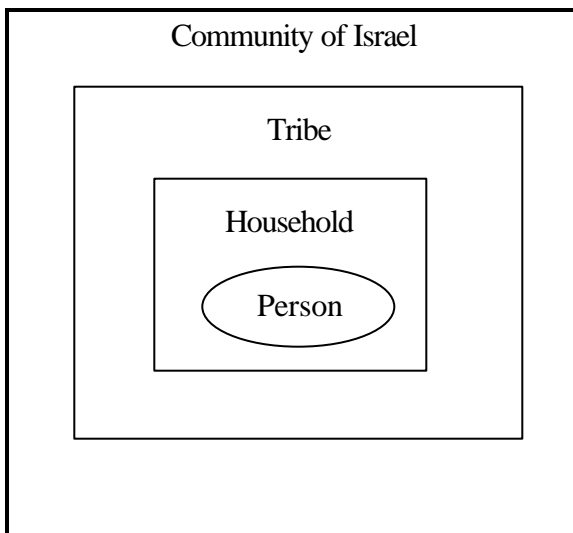
The Elder Team are responsible to select the Caregivers from their group, to form the Care Group by assigning households to each Caregiver, and to maintain regular supportive contact with their Caregivers.

## HOME Groups

Homes Open for Ministry and Encouragement is what the HOME Group ministry is about. A HOME Groups is a voluntary gathering of 3 to 15 people who commit themselves to regularly meet for the purpose of fellowship, edification, and evangelism. A HOME Group is lead by a HOME Pastor who has been selected by an Elder Team and completed the HOME Pastor Training Program. HOME Groups generally covenant to meet together seven months (February through September).

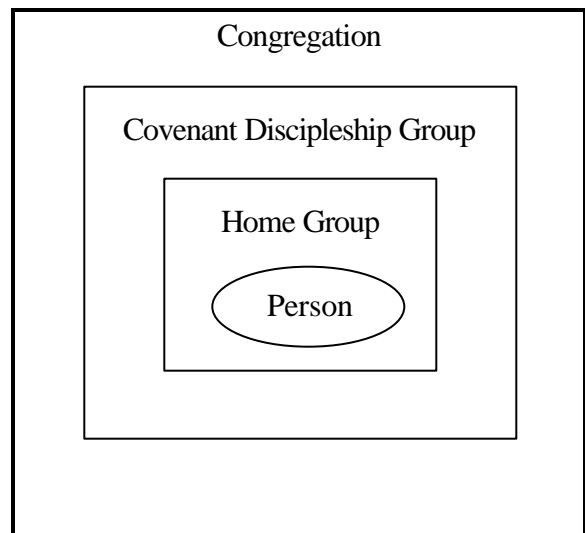
Ideally, each person at City Church would be bonded to the church in the following manner:

### Old Testament Model



### Koinonia Meetings

### City Church Model



Once a month, each Elder Group is to host a meeting outside the usual CDG meeting for a time of fellowship. The purpose of Koinonia meetings is to further build relationships among those in the group. This should be a time for relaxed and informal conversation and light refreshments. This would also be a great time to introduce new members to the group.

Each Koinonia meeting can be different. Some may emphasize the group getting to know each other. Others may have a spiritual tone. Still others may occasionally have elements of fun and recreation. (Remember, playing together is also a great tool for the bonding of relationships.)

Before the Koinonia meeting, the various members of the group should be contacted with an invitation to attend. Refreshments should be a shared activity, and by asking someone to bring some item, you greatly increase the possibility of their presence at the meeting.

## **Advising the Executive Pastoral Staff**

Proverbs 15:22 states, “Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisors they succeed.” While the Ministering Elders are not an administrative board or a board of directors, they are to serve as advisors and counselors to those who are called upon to make such decisions. The Ministering Elders are chosen because they are deemed spiritual men. A very important quality of spirituality is the ability to give sound advice based on godly wisdom.

James 5:17-18 gives the qualities of godly wisdom. It says, “The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.” It is this type of wisdom that should characterize the counsel of the Ministering Elders.

### **Areas Counsel Will Be Sought**

There are several areas counsel will be sought from the Ministering Elders. Although not limited to these, the areas include:

1. Appointment of new Elder Teams.
2. Addition of new members to the Executive Pastoral Staff.
3. Launching of major new programs or ministries.
4. Recommendation of ministerial candidates for licensing in the Church of God.
5. Decisions concerning certain moral, ethical or biblical positions our congregation is willing to make a public statement concerning.
6. Approval of the annual church budget.
7. Approval of all church mission trips and major fund raising efforts.

There will also be times when a member of the Executive Pastoral Staff may seek advise from his/her Elder concerning matters relative to his/her department. Also, the Senior Pastor’s office is always open to individual Elders so that there will be open communication between them for the good of the church.

## Serving as Examples

In I Peter 5:1-4 Peter gives three statements that set the appropriate attitude of an Elder in juxtaposition with the inappropriate attitude. Here is what he said:

“Be shepherd of God’s flock . . . not because you must . . . but because you are willing not greedy for money . . . but eager to serve not lording it over those entrusted to you . . . but being examples to the flock.

It is in this final statement that Peter gives us one of the most important roles of an Elder--to serve as role models for the Body.

The lives of each Elder Team should be of such a nature that they are willing to say with Paul, “We make ourselves a model for you to follow” (II Thessalonians 3:9). The character of godliness (devotion to God) should typify the life of an Elder. His life should be an inspiration to those in the congregation. In this way, his leadership will not be by external authority, but based on the holiness of his life.

### What Kind of Example Am I?

A good way to consider this question is to ask another question: “If everyone in our church were just like me what kind of church would we have?” Let us consider the implications of your example as an Elder;

If everyone were just like me . . .

What kind of prayer life would they have?

How often would they read the Bible?

What kind of marriage and family life would they have?

Would the church have enough funds to carry on its ministries?

What would the regular attendance of church services be like?

Could we find enough people to serve the Lord in the various ministries of the church?

How would they handle their problems, difficulties, and conflicts?

How many people would be won to the Lord?

What would the mood of our church be?

God is depending on you to set the example, Elders. You are to be living examples of the grace of God and commitment to Christ.

# *Covenant Discipleship Groups*

A Fresh Approach to Adult Ministry

# Introducing Covenant Discipleship Groups

## Introduction

Covenant Discipleship Groups (CDGs) represent a new approach to adult ministry. This new ministry is to be biblically based and at the same time fresh, innovative, and relevant to the contemporary needs of adult believers. The purpose of this introduction is to acquaint you with the exciting ministry of CDGs.

## Why the Name *Covenant Discipleship Group*?

This name was not chosen just because it sounded nice. These three words are very significant. They express the philosophy and objectives of the ministry. In order to understand this, let us look at the words individually.

## Covenant

The word “covenant” is firmly rooted in Holy Scripture. Its basic meaning is “an agreement, or a contract between two or more parties.” The reason this word was chosen is because adults in CDGs are being asked to enter into a covenant with each other. The covenant is based on the New Testament principle of *Body life and ministry*. This principle is made clear in over fifty *one another* passages found in the epistles. Among the more prominent of these are:

- Be devoted to one another. (Romans 12:10)
- Honor one another. (Romans 12:10)
- Encourage one another. (Hebrews 3:13)
- Love one another. (I Peter 1:22)
- Bear with one another. (Ephesians 4:2)
- Greet one another. (I Corinthians 16:20)
- Admonish one another. (Colossians 3:16)
- Confess your sins one to another. (James 5:16)
- Bear one another’s burdens. (Galatians 6:2)
- Pray for one another. (James 5:16)
- Instruct one another. (Romans 15:14)
- Forgive one another. (Ephesians 4:32)
- Accept one another. (Romans 15:7)

- Submit to one another. (Ephesians 5:21)
- Build each other up. (I Thessalonians 5:11)
- Offer hospitality to one another. (I Peter 4:9)
- Have fellowship with one another. (I John 1:7)

As a rule, Christians today have fallen far short of the ideals expressed in these passages. We have become very individualistic in our approach to the Christian life. However, the New Testament picture of the Christian life is one of fellowship--fellowship with God and fellowship with other believers.

Fellowship is more than just shaking hands in the church foyer or an ice cream social after church. It is a dynamic term that implies an active participation in each other's lives. It means the sharing together in the common life and faith in the Gospel.

CDGs offer a vehicle for Body life and ministry to take place. Here in an atmosphere of love, acceptance, and forgiveness, members of the Body are given the opportunity to practice biblical fellowship and accountability.

### **Discipleship**

The one task Jesus gave the Church was to "make disciples" (Matthew 28:19). Discipleship begins with conversion and public profession of faith in Christ through water baptism. Yet, this is the beginning, not the end. It includes teaching that leads to a life of obedience to Christ. A disciple, then, *is a believer in Jesus Christ who has openly acknowledged his faith and is committed to the Lordship of Christ in every area of life.*

CDGs represent a significant discipleship ministry of the church. Here, there will be a study of the Word of God, and again the focus will be on the group through sharing and discussion. All Bible studies will be practical, addressing the application of truth to contemporary life.

### **Groups**

Corporate worship is crucial to the life of the Body and to the spirituality of each believer. It is here that Kingdom principles are expressed and God is glorified through thanksgiving, praise, and worship. The focus is on God, not believers This is how it should be.

However, in order for there to be Body ministry believers must be willing to meet together in smaller groups. CDGs are small groups of believers who meet together regularly.

In summary, CDGs are *groups of believers who agree to meet together regularly in order to share together in Body life, ministry and accountability, to study the scriptures, and to grow in discipleship to Christ.*

## **How CDGs Will Be Formed**

Since 1978, our church has had a very effective Elder ministry. The Elders are charged with several important responsibilities that include maintaining fellowship, providing pastoral care, serving as examples of spiritual maturity, and guarding sound doctrine. Since the goals of the Elder ministry and the goals of CDGs are complimentary, it has been decided that CDGs will be organized around Elder leadership.

As in the past, each member of our congregation will be assigned an Elder. Those assigned to a particular Elder will form a CDG. Adults who are not members of our church, but are regular attenders, will also be given the opportunity to become part of a CDG. This can be done in one of two ways:

1. By making a request to the Pastor's office to have an Elder assigned to you.
2. By regularly attending the weekly meeting of a particular CDG.

Most CDGs will be multi-generational. However, there will be some special CDGs designed to minister to the unique needs of adult members. Among these will be singles and young married adults. Persons who fall into one of these groups may choose another CDG if they so desire.

## **When CDGs Will Meet**

CDGs will be replacing the adult Sunday School Department. This is not to be taken to mean that CDG is just a new name for Sunday School. The Sunday School has served the church well through the years, but the changing times and needs of adults require a new approach. CDG is a totally new concept.

CDGs will meet for 60 minutes each week from 9:45 to 10:45 a.m. There are many advantages of having CDGs meet on Sunday mornings at 9:45 a.m. Some of these are:

1. It is a convenient time since most of the congregation will be coming for the 11:00 a.m. worship service.

2. It is also convenient for those adults with children since child care is provided through the Children's Department and the Nursery.
3. Since CDGs will meet at the church, no one will have difficulty finding the location.

In addition to the Sunday morning meeting of the CDG, there will also be monthly Koinonia meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to foster fellowship and social interaction among the group. These meetings will usually be away from the church at someone's home or another location.

## **What to Expect at a CDG Meeting**

The weekly meeting of the CDG should be one of the most exciting and spiritually challenging events in which an adult Christian can participate. While the structure of each CDG meeting will vary from group to group, the basic format will center around three focal points: (1) relationship building, (2) Bible study and discussion, and (3) mutual ministry. Let us look at what these entail.

### **Relationship Building**

In an earlier section, we discussed the relational nature of Christianity. CDGs will help foster the growth of this important dimension of our faith. During the weekly meeting, there will be time for the informal sharing of fellowship. In the initial phase of the ministry, much time will be spent on members of the group getting to know each other. Special activities will be provided for the incorporation of new members who join after the CDG has begun. Some groups may choose to have light refreshments, giving a more relaxed atmosphere to the meeting.

### **Bible Study and Discussion**

The study of God's Word will be one of the main anchors of the CDG meeting. It will be the responsibility of the Elder to select the subject matter for the study. However, the CDG is not a forum for a weekly *lecture* by the Elder. The Bible study is to be a genuine time of *sharing together around the Word*. Group participation and sharing will be emphasized. The Elder may ask a group member to lead a series of Bible studies on a particular topic from time to time. Practical application of scriptural principles to daily life will be the priority of a Bible study.

## **Mutual Ministry**

Each week members of the CDG will have the opportunity to share special needs in their life with other members of the group. The group will then have the opportunity to reach out and minister to them with Christ's love and power. Ministry allows gifts of the Spirit to be discovered and used. The compassion of Christ is demonstrated as the Body of Christ ministers to its *hurting members*. The CDG will be the place for the manifestation of God's power through miraculous signs and wonders.

**Covenant Disciples Groups** . . . a new approach to adult ministry . . . biblical . . . fresh . . . innovative . . . exciting! Make plans to be part of this dynamic ministry.

## Leading Covenant Discipleship Groups

Note: As a prerequisite for this session, Elder Teams should have read *Introducing Covenant Discipleship Groups*.

We have defined a CDG as “a small group of believers who agree to meet together regularly in order to share together in Body life, ministry, and accountability; to study the scriptures; and to grow in Christian discipleship.” CDGs have the potential to dynamically impact the adult believers who participate in them, and as individual believers are changed, the entire Body is transformed.

The success of the CDG ministry depends on two very important factors: (1) commitment and (2) preparation. Commitment must first of all be to seek God’s anointing and blessings. No spiritual ministry can be maintained by sheer human effort. The Bible is very clear, “Not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, says the Lord” (Zechriah 4:6). We must be willing to pray, seek the face of the Lord, and be sensitive to his direction.

Commitment also will involve personal dedication to the ministry. A haphazard, half-hearted approach will guarantee failure. As an Elder Team, you must have a vision of what God can do through you and in the lives of those in your Elder Group. If your vision is great, the commitment will be present. The size of the sacrifice you are willing to make is directly related to the size of your vision.

The second success factor is preparation. A vision must be accompanied by concrete plans and detailed preparation. Without these, our dreams will evaporate as quickly as the morning mist. The purpose of this session is to prepare for this great task. As Scripture says, we are to “prepare our minds for action” (Peter 1:13).

### Understanding the Purpose of CDGs

In our initial consideration about this adult ministry, several questions confront us. These are:

1. How can the Body of Christ be equipped for ministry and helped to discover and use spiritual gifts in ministry?
2. How can the principle of Body life and mutual ministry be practiced more effectively in our church?

3. How can the Elder Teams have more contact with and more impact on those in their ministry group?
4. How can we involve more adults in meaningful Bible study and discipleship?

In seeking answers to these questions, God led us to develop the CDG ministry. It is God's ministry at this time for our church.

There are two ways of viewing a CDG meeting--as an *event* or as a *catalyst*. This diagram helps to see the difference:

<b>An event . . .</b>	<b>A catalyst . . .</b>
. . . is an experiential occurrence.	. . . exists to make things happen in what it touches.
. . . is an end in itself.	. . . is a means to an end.
. . . is evaluated by its enjoyment..	. . . is evaluated by what it produces.
. . . if good, is met with compliments by participants.	. . . if good, may not be complimented, but participants will live differently afterwards.

CDGs are to be catalysts. If the people in your CDG do not experience changed lives, discipleship is not taking place. The excitement of leading a CDG is seeing people change. As you approach your weekly meeting, do so with anticipation: "Today, something is going to happen to somebody. Not everybody will change today, but somebody is going to hear something that will make a difference. Somebody is going to change an attitude. Somebody is going to turn on to the practicality of the Bible."

### **CDG Weekly Meetings**

The weekly meeting of CDGs will be on Sunday morning from 9:45 to 10:45 a.m. The meeting will have a three-fold objective: (1) fellowship, (2) Bible study, and (3) mutual ministry. This emphasis can be seen in the Early Church in Acts 2:42. "They devoted themselves to the Apostles' teaching (Bible study) and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread (fellowship) and to prayer (mutual ministry)." Let us look at these three important aspects of the CDG ministry.

## A. Fellowship

God made us relational creatures. We long to share our lives and experiences with others. In light of this, Christianity is relational, and the dynamic word that expresses this aspect of our faith is *fellowship*.

Fellowship (Greek-*koinonia*) conveys two related meanings: (1) to share together in the sense of a joint participation or partnership, and (2) to share with in the sense of giving what we have to others. These two aspects of New Testament fellowship are to be kept in mind in the CDG.

Probably the single most important part of the CDG is the *atmosphere* of the meeting. By atmosphere, we mean the mood of the meeting. The moment a person walks into the meeting room, he can sense a mood. It may be warm and inviting or cold and rigid. The success of the entire hour may be determined by the first ten to fifteen minutes. Here is an area in which we do not want to let our own short-sightedness hinder something God wants to do in a person's life.

*Love and acceptance* is the atmosphere we want to create. From the moment a person walks into the room until he walks out, we want him/her to know that they are among friends--brothers and sisters in Christ--who love and accept him/her in Christ. Here are some ideas that will be helpful in creating such an atmosphere:

1. Have everyone wear a name tag. In this way, everyone can become familiar with each other on a first name basis. Newcomers can become better acquainted with other group members more easily.
2. Plan to have *light* refreshments. This tends to create a more relaxed, informal atmosphere.
3. Consider that the meeting actually begins when the first person arrives. This means that the fellowship time will actually begin about 15 minutes before the official starting time.
4. Create an atmosphere of openness in communication by sharing about yourself and your experiences.
5. Encourage people not to immediately take a seat, but encourage standing, sharing in conversation with other group members until the starting time.
6. Notice when a group member is having a difficult time entering in and give them special attention.

7. Address people by their names as often as possible. This helps them feel accepted.
8. Involve various group members in tasks associated with the group's ministry (*e.g.* helping with refreshments, opening with prayer, leading a discussion, serving as treasurer, working with hospitality, etc.)
9. Cards and telephone calls during the week help a person know they are loved and accepted and they belong.

*Bonding* is a very important word that relates to biblical fellowship. It refers to the cementing of a relationship, and this does not happen quickly or without effort. Bonding begins to happen as people *share* together in spiritual ministry, as they *play* and *celebrate* together, as they *pray* together. You know that bonding has occurred when people begin to genuinely care about each other's joys and sorrows, when they look forward to their time together, when a person is missed if absent, when you are willing to make sacrifices for another.

It is precisely this kind of relationship that the believers in the New Testament had. This is the goal of CDG ministry.

## **B. Bible Study**

God's Word is central to our lives and the CDG meeting. At least 30 minutes should be dedicated to Bible study.

The Bible study portion of the weekly meeting is to place a high priority on *group participation* and *practical application*. The meeting is not a lecture hall for the Elder to provide a powerful, inspiring, highly motivating, spiritually moving lecture on a biblical text. We must move away from a spectator/participant mentality (an event) to a group interaction mentality (a catalyst). Primarily, the Bible study will be a group discussion. Here are some guidelines that will help make your discussion effective:

1. Keep in mind that the goal of a discussion is to help the participants think through the issue and interact with others in the process.
2. Do not be fooled into thinking that a discussion will just happen. The leader must have prepared in advance. He must be familiar with the subject in order to steer the discussion, make sure the questions and answers center on scriptures, and keep the discussion on track.

3. See that everyone has a Bible.
4. Three types of questions are used in leading a discussion:
  - a. Information questions - These are questions whose answers can be found in the actual text of the scripture. The focus is, “What does it say?”
  - b. Analytical questions - These questions go one step further. Here the group must interact and the Holy Spirit is able to enlighten God’s Word to our hearts. The focus of an analytical question is, “What does it mean?”
  - c. Personal application - This becomes the heart of the whole matter. The success of the Bible study is wrapped up in what happens afterward. It is not whether we had a good time, but were lives changed. The focus of personal application questions is, “What does this Scripture mean to me?”
5. In a discussion there will be times of *mini-lectures*. These are for giving important background information that may be necessary for setting up a discussion. However, they must remain just that--*mini*.
6. The discussion leader does not present himself as the *answer man*. In fact, a leader who admits human fallibility gains credibility. The group sees him as an example of the fact that God really works in the lives of real people.

(Note: Supplemental material is provided at the end of this manual on leading an effective discussion)

Every effective Bible study must be practical. It must provide *handles* that people can grasp and apply to their lives. The first step in seeing this happen is the leader’s setting a specific goal for each Bible study session. The question that must confront the leader is, “What do I want to see changed as a result of this Bible study?” Changes can occur in our ideas and attitudes, in our store of information, and in our behavior, but we must be challenged for this to happen. Therefore, no CDG should end without a specific and challenging call for the application of the truth from God’s Word. This can be done in several ways:

1. Through the use of special personal application questions.
2. Through giving a specific opportunity in which the biblical truth might be applied.
3. Through a time of prayer and meditation asking the Holy Spirit to speak to our hearts.
4. Through writing out a commitment that comes from the Bible study.

It is not the responsibility of the Elder to lead every Bible study. In fact, he should be watchful for others whom the Lord may have gifted with a teaching gift and periodically allow them to share in the Bible study responsibilities.

### **C. Mutual Ministry**

The Body of Christ reaching out in ministry to each member, building up and strengthening each other in the faith, is what Body life is all about. Each week in the CDG meeting, there should be the opportunity for the group to reach out in ministry to each other. Some suggestions in this area are:

1. Give opportunity for group members to share special needs.
2. Make your prayer time meaningful. It should be specific and personal. Here are some suggestions in this area:
  - a. Rather than taking a list of several requests and praying for all of them together, pray for them one at a time.
  - b. Use the biblical principle of laying on hands when needed.
  - c. Sometimes joining hands and praying conversationally is very meaningful.
  - d. Ask specific group members to pray for a special need while the others join their faith with them silently.
3. Expect and encourage the manifestation of spiritual gifts during ministry time.
4. Signs, wonders, and miracles will occur in CDG meetings, so do not be afraid to pray boldly.
5. Use praise and worship choruses as part of your ministry time.
6. Do not forget about group members who may need ministry, but are unable to attend the meeting. Pray for them and make plans for ministry during the week if possible.
7. Give a weekly prayer list so that group members may make a list of things for intercession during the week.
8. Do not be afraid to call for special times of fasting and prayer from your group.

With the proper blend of fellowship, Bible study, and ministry, CDGs are going to explode with excitement! God will be afforded an opportunity to work in his people's lives, and spiritual fruit will spring forth.

## **The Importance of a Good Beginning**

You only have one opportunity to make a first impression, so your first few meetings are very important. Some practical steps you can take to get off to a good start are:

1. Pray! You can have no success without prayer. God is your only source for success.
2. Send the introductory letter to all the people in your group.
3. Follow-up on the letter with a personal telephone call. This is for you to become better acquainted with those in your group and to encourage them to attend the first meeting.
4. Make sure your meeting area is set up the way you want it in advance. The meeting area should look like you planned for the occasion.
5. Make sure that refreshments are prepared and ready to go before the beginning of the meeting.
6. Have name tags for all members of your group prepared in advance.
7. Be at the door to welcome group members as they arrive.
8. Use the first couple of sessions simply as times to become acquainted with one another. Probably no in-depth Bible study should begin until about the third or fourth meeting.
9. Follow-up the first session with a card or telephone call to those who came.
10. As new people come to the meeting, be sure to introduce them to the group.

## **Leadership of a CDG**

An Elder Team is responsible for providing the supervisory leadership for a CDG. However, other leaders will be needed. Here are a few you should consider for your group.

### **A. Treasurer**

Each CDG should receive a weekly offering. This offering will remain with the group. It is important that a responsible person be selected to take care of the funds.

### **B. Hospitality**

These people could help with the weekly refreshments and clean up when the class is over. They could also see that the name tags are ready for distribution each week.

### **C. Caregivers**

Caregivers are assigned 5 to 7 families for whom they provide spiritual care on a regular basis. A Caregiver is part of *The Ministry Network (TMN)*.

**D. HOME Pastor**

HOME Pastors lead small groups that regularly meet in homes throughout the city. Each CDG should have several HOME Pastors, who are also part of *The Ministry Network (TMN)*.

**E. Future Elders**

As our church grows it will be necessary for new Elder Teams to come from the Body. You should be discerning whom in your group God is preparing for this task.

**Important Information to Keep in Mind**

Each CDG will have a weekly record book. This book is for your convenience in keeping up with the various members of your group. Please see that the book is maintained properly and neatly.

You will be responsible to turn in a weekly attendance report at the conclusion of each meeting. It is very important for this to be done.

Occasionally it will be necessary for you to miss your weekly meeting. Should this occur, it will be your responsibility to see that the needs of your CDG are covered.

Your CDG will have its own treasury. These funds are to be disbursed only with the permission of the group itself. In addition to class needs (refreshments, flowers, cards, stamps, etc.), it would be good if each group used a portion of its funds to regularly support a special ministry.

**Conclusion**

Covenant Discipleship Groups are God's plan for our church at this time. Great things will happen as we seek to follow his leadership. May his anointing rest on you as you go forth in this bold venture of faith.

## **The Ministry Network**

The Ministry Network (TMN) is the official name of the ministry arm that consists of Elder Teams, Caregivers and HOME Pastors. The whole purpose of TMN is to establish a network of spiritual care through which the needs of the congregation are addressed.

Noted church growth expert, Carl George, has said, “Every person in the church needs someone who will love them enough to listen to them.” Caring ministry is the heartbeat of the church and the secret ingredient of nurture and growth. However, in a large church, providing such care cannot be an assumed ministry. It must be an intentional effort. This is the vision of TMN

TMN is a simple, workable plan by which each member of the church is able to receive personal ministry on a systematic basis. It is fully under the oversight of the Eldership of the church. In fact, the Elder Teams are part of TMN.

### **The Vision of TMN**

The vision is that of a vine and the branches (John 15). Not only is each branch vitally related to the vine, but each branch is also interrelated to all the branches (network). The life of Christ flows to each branch through the other branches. Paul echoed this concept in Ephesians 4:15-16.

This principle of networking is seen in several biblical passages. Moses was instructed to divide the children of Israel into groups for effective ministry (Exodus 18:13-27). Jesus, in feeding the multitude, divided the crowd into groups of 100s and 50s and assigned the structured groups to his disciples for the distribution of food. Paul told Timothy to find qualified men who could teach others (II Timothy 2:2). The vision of TMN is to mobilize responsible believers in a biblical pattern for ministry.

### **How Does TMN Work?**

TMN is structured around our current Covenant Discipleship Groups (CDG), led by Elder Teams. Each Elder Team chooses a team of leaders to assist with the ministry to the CDG. This team will consist of *Caregivers* and *HOME Pastors*.

Caregivers are committed to the task of providing ministry to 5 to 7 families (a Care Group) within the CDG. They agree to: (1) pray regularly for their people, (2) be available to those in their Care Group, (3) contact each home in their Care Group at least on a monthly basis, and (4) provide a Christian example. Also, they keep the Elder Team informed of special needs within their Care Group and turn in a monthly report of activities.

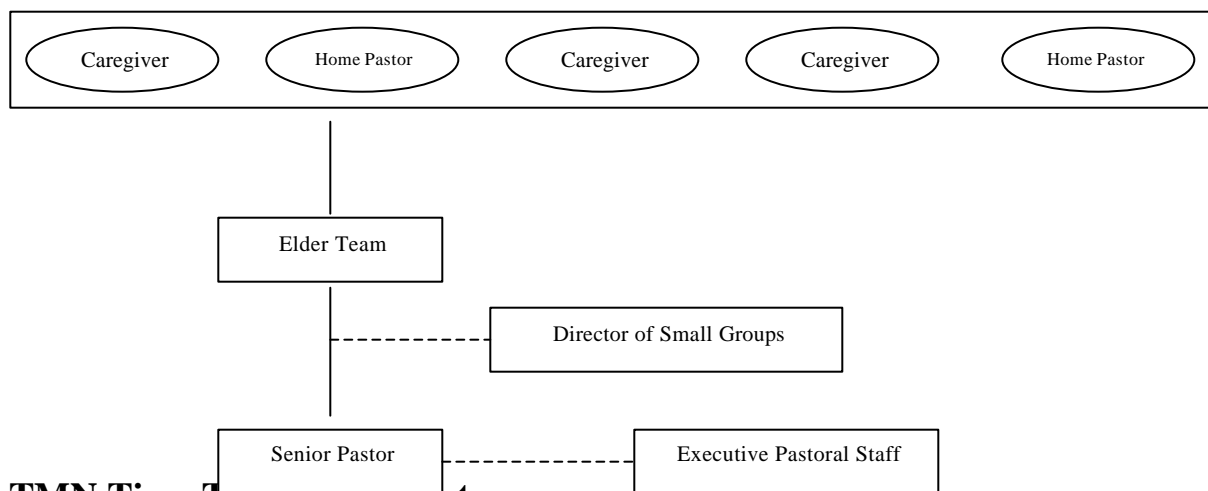
It is the Elder Team’s responsibility to select Caregivers, see that the Caregivers attend the Caregiver Training, form the Care Groups within the CDG, and maintain regular, supportive contact with the Caregivers. Each CDG should have one Caregiver for every 5 to 7 families.

HOME Pastors are CDG leaders who regularly lead a HOME Group. HOME is an acronym formed from **H**omes **O**pen for **M**inistry and **E**ncouragement. Before a person can become a HOME Pastor, they must complete the HOME Pastor Training that is offered each year.

The Elder Team is responsible for selecting the HOME Pastors from their CDG. However, people are not assigned to a HOME Group. The HOME Pastor and the HOME Group itself form its own group. Every CDG is encouraged to have at least one HOME Pastor for every ten families within it. The Elder Team supports the HOME Pastor by encouragement, announcing the HOME Group’s meetings in CDG, and through occasionally attending the HOME Group meetings themselves.

## Organization Structure of *The Ministry Network*

### Full View of a CDG Covenant Discipleship Group



**TMN Time Table and Events**

TMN operates on the following regularly scheduled events:

### **September**

- New Elder Training
- Annual Elder Update Training
- Elder Assignments (CDGs) are made
- New Elders are installed
- TMN Appreciation Banquet
- Final meetings of HOME Groups (Note: Some groups may desire to continue meeting)

### **October**

- New TMN year begins
- Monthly meeting of Eldership
- Elders begin selecting Caregivers

### **November**

- Caregiver Training
- Monthly meeting of Eldership
- Care Groups are formed by Elder Teams
- Caregivers Dedication Service
- HOME Pastor candidates considered by Elder Teams

### **December**

- Caregivers complete initial contact of their Care Group
- Elder Team fellowship
- HOME Pastor candidates confirmed by end of month

### **January**

- Monthly meeting of Eldership
- HOME Pastor Training

### **February**

- HOME Pastor Installation and Dedication Service
- Monthly meeting of Eldership
- HOME Pastors hold initial meeting of their HOME Groups
- TMN Huddle Meeting (Elder Teams, HOME Pastors, Caregivers)

### **March**

- Elder Team fellowship
- HOME Groups are meeting
- HOME Pastors monthly meeting

### **April**

- Monthly meeting of Eldership
- HOME Groups are meeting
- HOME Pastors monthly meeting

## **May**

Monthly meeting of Eldership  
Candidates for new Elder Teams presented to Eldership  
Elders nominate candidates for Deacon  
TMN Huddle Meeting (Elder Teams, HOME Pastors, Caregivers)  
HOME Groups are meeting

## **June**

Elder Team fellowship  
New Elder Teams confirmed  
HOME Pastors monthly meeting  
HOME Groups are meeting

## **July**

Monthly meeting of Eldership  
HOME Pastors monthly meeting  
HOME Groups are meeting

## **August**

Monthly meeting of Eldership (budget approval)  
TMN Huddle Meeting (Elder Teams, HOME Pastors, Caregivers)

## **Reports**

*Elder Reports* to the Pastor are due the **second Sunday of each month.**

*Caregiver Reports* to Elder Teams are due the **first Sunday of each month.**

*HOME Pastor Reports* are due at the **HOME Pastors monthly meeting.** A copy will be sent to the appropriate Elder Team the first week of each month.

## **The Relationship Between Elders and Deacons**

There is much misunderstanding concerning the subject of deacons. In some churches, deacons are mere figureheads, but in others, they function as a quasi body of elders. Within these churches, deacons are viewed as the board of directors, business administrators, or the official church board. However, the New Testament clearly shows that the elders, not the deacons, are the overseers. The office of deacons, by its very definition, means servant, not overseer.

### **Example of the Seven**

In the first Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 1-7), the twelve Apostles were the overseers. In essence, they were the elders. Not only did they lead and teach, they also administered the community's funds and distributed the funds to the poor (Acts 4:34-5:11). This soon became too much of a burden, and a problem arose about the fair distribution of food to the widows (Acts 6:1).

Wisely, the Apostles realized the urgent need for organizational change to relieve themselves from some of the heavy tasks they had assumed, which were not part of their original commission from Christ. As a solution, they called the congregation together and explained the problem (Acts 6:2) and proposed that the congregation select seven qualified men, whom the Apostles would place in charge of the matter. This is exactly what occurred (Acts 6:5-6).

Even though the Seven are never called deacons, Luke's account of their appointment is indispensable to the study of deacons. There seems to be an obvious connection between the Acts 6 account and the later development of the office of deacon. Acts 6 provides a dynamic, apostolic example that later leaders could follow and adapt to their own situations. The Seven were a prototype of the later role of deacon.

### **Servant's Role**

The problems the Apostles encountered in Jerusalem always occur in a large or growing church. As congregations grow, so does the amount and diversity of the elder's work. Like the Apostles, elders today need relief and congregations need the loving care of a body of servants.

To relieve the elder's burden, Scriptures gives authority to a special office of servant--the deacon. The Greek word, *diakonoi*, literally means servants or helpers. These qualified men are

chosen to serve the congregation in general and the eldership in particular. They are referred to in Philippians 1:1 and I Timothy 3:8-12.

In both of these scriptural references, deacons are closely related to elders. As the terms and the order in which they are placed indicate, deacons are subordinate to the elders. Unlike the deacons, elders are responsible for the overall leadership, supervision, and teaching of the congregation. The work of deacons is to be done in harmony with the elders and to complement the elders' work.

Also, the word, *deacons*, is always plural. Like the elders, deacons are a corporate body or team of servants.

Deacons must meet specific qualifications that are similar to those required of elders. The reason for this is that they handled highly responsible and sensitive tasks on behalf of the congregation. Not just anyone can do some of the deacon's duties; therefore, they must be men who have the full confidence of the congregation.

The New Testament intentionally lists no fixed duties for deacons. As their name indicates, deacons are good servants who serve in whatever capacity they are needed. They adjust to meet the needs at hand. There appears to be great latitude in their work that is sanctioned by Scriptures. The very existence of deacons is based on need. They relieve the elders of some of their work and so serve the whole congregation.

## Personal Evaluation for the Office of Deacon

The following questions are to help you evaluate your maturity level as a Christian and spiritual leader. It is based on the qualities stated in God's Word for the office of Deacon (Acts 6:3, I Timothy 3:8-13). Please circle the number that best represents your self-rating from dissatisfied (1) to satisfied (7).

1. Are you filled with the Spirit and living a Spirit-filled life?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
2. Are you a person of wisdom? Are you able to use sound, sensible judgment as well as sensitivity to biblical principles in making decisions?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
3. How do you evaluate your reputation as a Christian?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
4. Are you a sincere person? Are you a person who is known for integrity and trustworthiness?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
5. Are you addicted to anything that is controlling your life? Furthermore, are you doing anything that is causing a weaker Christian to stumble and sin against God?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
6. Are you free from the love of money? Do you seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness and practice stewardship through consistent tithing? Are you free from greed and covetousness?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
7. Do you hold firmly to sound doctrine? Do you accept the basic statement of faith in our church?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
8. How do you evaluate your overall relationship with your wife? If you are not married, how well are you handling sexual pressures?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
9. Do you have your household in order? Do your wife and children love and respect you and are they responding to your God and Savior and His claim on their lives?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied
10. Are you in the process of continual growth in your Christian life, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ?  
Dissatisfied    1    2    3    4    5    6    7    Satisfied

# **Teaching Adults Through Discussion**

**Ed Steward**

## Introduction

“What is a great discussion!” Tim remarked enthusiastically to Ben as they walked together out of their Homebuilders classroom. “Alan really helped me find some practical ways to relate Ephesians 6 to my life this week.”

“You said it! I had the same feeling,” Ben replied. “Alan not only knows his Bible, he is also a natural born discussion leader. Did you notice how smoothly he involved all nine of us in the discussion? And nobody felt pressured to speak. Alan just drew comments out of people with those thought-provoking questions.”

Tim stopped Ben just as they reached the narthex. “Say, we have a few minutes before worship service. Let’s go back and tell Alan how much we enjoyed today’s Bible study.”

Tim and Ben found Alan straightening chairs in their classroom. The two class members expressed appreciation to their teacher and Alan thanked them for their affirmative remarks. But then Alan confided in them, “The truth of the matter is, I am not a natural born discussion leader as you suggest. In fact, I doubt that there are many ‘naturals’ around. Discussion leaders are made, not born.”

“But you lead the group so effortlessly in Bible discussion,” Ben persisted.

“Well, thanks for the compliment,” Alan said. “But my success as a discussion leader is the result of some good training I received at an ICL seminar, several months of practice in a home Bible study, and careful preparation before each Bible discussion. Discussion leadership is a skill that almost anyone can learn.

Perhaps you have been under the impression that the ability to lead an effective Bible discussion is inborn. Maybe you have thought about the discussion-leading talent, “If you have got it, use it; if you don’t have it, lecture.”

But Alan’s statement to his two class members is true: “Discussion leaders are made, not born.” Any teacher of adults can learn the skills that will help him lead meaningful and profitable Bible discussions. This booklet will help you develop discussion-leading skills that will increase the effectiveness of Bible discussion wherever you are responsible for it.

# Teaching Adults Through Discussion

## Discussion: What Is It All About?

### What is Discussion?

The dictionary defines discussion as “consideration of a question in open, usually informal debate” (*Webster’s Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary, Springfield, MS:G, and C. Merriam Company, 1965*). But within the context of Bible study for adults, discussion has a narrower focus. For the purpose of this booklet, we will define discussion as *informal group conversation that is centered on a Bible text and directed toward a meaningful goal*.

Let us look more closely at several of the key words in that definition in order to expand the meaning of discussion in teaching adults.

**Informal** ■ This term describes the atmosphere for effective discussion. It should be casual and nonthreatening. In the classroom *informal* suggests a circle of chairs rather than straight rows facing the leader, and perhaps coffee and cookies for participants. In home Bible study, information discussion can take place in a comfortable living room or den or even around the dining room or kitchen table with light refreshments readily available.

**Group Conversation** ■ No, this does not mean that everyone in the group discussion talks at once, even though some discussions end up this way! Rather, *group conversation* means that everyone present is invited and encouraged to contribute their ideas throughout the course of the discussion.

*Conversation* also connotes give and take dialogue rather than a series of sermonettes delivered by each of the participants. Each discussion group member should feel as comfortable about contributing to the Bible discussion as he would discussing the weather, gasoline prices or his children in daily conversation.

The word *conversation* also dictates the approximate size group that can be involved in successful discussion. The group must be small enough so that each member may take part within the time allowed. For example, you cannot have an effective discussion if you have 50 participants and only 45 minutes discussion period. Each participant will average less than one minute of sharing time,

and even that will diminish if you have two or three “orators” who take more than their share of the time.

Discussion may run a little thin with a group of fewer than six and may become unwieldy with a group of more than ten. If you have a class or study group with 30-40 members, you need to break the class into five to eight smaller groups for effective discussion. Six to ten is the ideal number for most discussions.

Some people see discussion as being a series of simultaneous conversations taking place between the discussion leader and each member of the discussion group. However, a good discussion is one in which all the participants, including the leader, are freely interacting with each other. Each person should feel free to address a question or comment to any other member of the discussion group.

***Centered on a Bible text*** ■ This booklet is focusing on effective Bible discussion. As such, each discussion within this context must have Scripture as its foundation. It is true that the discussion technique outlines in this book will be helpful in leading a topical discussion or a discussion based on sharing personal experiences. But the technique is most effective when applied to a specific Bible text that the leader desires his discussion group to explore.

***Directed*** ■ This term says that a successful discussion must have a leader. In a small class, the leader may be the teacher. In a large class, group leaders may be selected from among the learners and equipped for group discussion leadership by the teacher or discussion leader. A discussion group without leadership is like a ship without a rudder. It may stay afloat--meaning that the group will probably talk about something--but you have no guarantee that it will reach its destination. The role of the leader in group discussion will be presented more completely later in this book.

***Toward a meaningful goal*** ■ One of the dangers of using the discussion method is the temptation to use discussion for discussion's sake alone. We sometimes feel that a discussion is successful when all the participants contribute or when class goes overtime because people are so involved in the topic. But that is like saying, “These must be good oranges because there are so many of them.”

Each Bible discussion must aim at contributing something specific to the process of Christian growth that is taking place in each participant. A Bible discussion is successful if it contributes to the

spiritual growth of the individuals participating. Goals for discussion will be treated more thoroughly in another section of this book.

## Value of Discussion

Next to the lecture method, discussion is the most widely used method for teaching adults. It is true that adults enjoy listening to a challenging speaker whose lofty rhetoric or down-home illustrations motivate them to action or renewed commitment. The lecture method does play a vital role in the teaching ministry to adults. But adults also love to discuss the Bible, and there are specific advantages to using the discussion method in teaching the Bible to adults. Perhaps an understanding of these advantages will prompt you to utilize the discussion method more often in your teaching ministry.

***Discussion insures retention of information*** ■ Several studies have been made that contrast retention in learning at various levels of learner involvement. When a learner is only listening to a Bible speaker (on radio, tape or non-illustrated sermon), he will retain only about 12 percent of what he hears. If the visual element is added (as with illustrations, diagrams, pictures, printed notes or outlines, etc.), the learner retains approximately 50 percent of what he hears and sees together. But when a learner is participating in the learning exercises--actively involved instead of passively sitting and watching--he will retain up to 90 percent of what he sees, hears and does.

An effective Bible study discussion involves each participant in the learning process. By involvement in discussion, a learner will remember and apply to his life much more than if the Bible information was lectured to him.

***Discussion encourages value formation*** ■ When an individual listens to a lecture, he is seldom called upon to respond to what he is hearing. As the lecturer states his case, the listener (if he is truly listening instead of dozing or daydreaming!) may nod his head in assent, raise his eyebrows in wonder or clench his teeth in disagreement. But when people are involved in a discussion they are challenged to formulate and possibly even defend their position on an issue rather than merely accept or reject the position of the speaker. Furthermore, as discussion continues, the discussion members help each other clarify their values and positions on issues through the give and take of the conversation.

***Discussion develops questioning skills*** ■ As you will discover later in this booklet, the skilled use of questions is indispensable to leading a meaningful discussion. When people are exposed to a question/answer format during discussion, they learn to investigate, analyze and apply

biblical material with questions. Once learned, the art of asking questions is an invaluable tool in personal and group Bible study.

***Discussion creates a sense of community*** ■ Just as any task that requires more than one person for completion, discussion tends to pull people together in the accomplishment of a common goal. A discussion topic or problem becomes *our* topic or problem, the discoveries become *our* discoveries, and the solutions become *our* solutions. A discussion concludes with the awareness that the discoveries and conclusions could not have been reached by the participants working alone, but only by the group process.

***Discussion affirms each participant*** ■ Each individual who takes part in a discussion has the satisfaction of knowing he has contributed to the success of the discussion as a whole. Every contribution to the discussion--a comment, a clarifying question, a personal experience, even a nod or a “hmmm”--is of value. It is a learning experience in which each participant can say, “I took part. I helped make it a success.”

***Discussion taps into adult experiences*** ■ Each adult brings into the classroom a wide range of life experiences gained from many years of adult life. The discussion method takes advantage of the resource of life experience in each adult in order to enhance and enrich Bible study. The personal examples that surface during discussion can broaden the application of biblical principles for each participant.

***Discussion provides needed feedback*** ■ Unless he calls for specific response to his presentation, the lecturer has little or no idea what his learners are thinking or feeling. It is one-way communication. But in discussion, the leader is getting continual feedback from the participants because they are answering questions, making comments and sharing personal experiences on the discussion theme. This kind of feedback not only helps the teacher know where his learners are, but helps the learners articulate facts and feelings that might remain unspoken in a lecture format.

## **The Discussion Leader: What Is His Role?**

The discussion leader plays the most vital role in the success of a bible discussion. Though he must keep a low profile in terms of authority in the group, the discussion leader's preparation and leadership (or lack of them) will make or break the discussion group. Briefly, the discussion leader's

role is to keep the discussion moving, encourage participation and make sure everyone stays on the subject.

## **What is a Discussion Leader?**

Let us identify the components that go together to make a successful discussion leader. Do not lose heart if you find that some of these elements are weak or missing from your make-up as a teacher/leader. Remember, discussion leaders are made, not born. Each of these elements is more of a learned skill than a natural trait. There is plenty of room for growth in all of us.

**A *catalyst*** ■ In chemistry a catalyst is a substance that, when added to other chemicals, causes change to occur rapidly. In Bible discussion, the leader is a catalyst causing interaction to take place between the discussion group members. The leader serves as a subtle catalyst by creating the proper atmosphere for the discussion through personal warmth, openness and preparation. Once the discussion is underway, the leader keeps things happening by asking questions, posing problems, probing for response and sparking interaction. The leader keeps the ball rolling in discussion by modeling personal interest in the discussion and by skillfully using the discussion tools at his disposal.

**A *guide*** ■ Whenever people are encouraged to participate in open discussion, the possibility of individuals getting off the track and onto tangents is very real. The discussion leader must be a gentle but firm guide keeping the discussion centered on the Bible text and discussion focus that have been selected. The leader must be ready to ask, “How does your comment relate to the theme of today’s Bible text?” in order to help individuals tie their often tangential comments to the discussion focus. People will tend to resist pressure from the leader to “get off your hobby horse and back onto the subject.” But a skillful leader can accomplish this guidance in a way that encourages participants rather than threatens or stifles them.

**A *clarifier*** ■ Each individual who participates in Bible discussion speaks from his own background and frame of reference. And since backgrounds and points of view differ, someone in the discussion circle must be ready to clarify questions and comments so that each person in the group has the maximum opportunity to understand and apply what is being said. Though others in the group may help in clarification, the leader must be prepared to be the group clarifier.

Clarification is critical in two areas. First, each discussion question must be clear in the minds of the participants. Therefore, it is helpful for the discussion leader to repeat, and often rephrase,

questions that are raised in the group, especially his own. When writing the questions for a Bible discussion, it is a good idea for the leader to think of two or three different ways of stating the question. Rephrasing the questions will help group members grasp the meaning of each question. Also, when another group member raises a question, the leader should repeat the question in his own words in order to clarify it for the other members.

Second, it is important that the discussion leader help clarify responses to questions and other comments. The leader can clarify responses in several ways. He can summarize a lengthy response into a concise sentence in order to help the group members pull the loose ends of the response together in their own minds. The leader may also rephrase responses into language that may be more common to those in the group. One helpful technique in clarification is to say, "Let me tell you what I hear you saying, and then you tell me if am hearing correctly." This allows discussion members to clarify their own statements as they hear them verbalized by the leader.

Once the discussion leader is operating as a clarifier in the group, other members will pick up the skill of clarification and assist the leader in keeping the waters clear for everyone during the discussion.

Caution needs to be exercised as the leader serves as clarifier during discussion. The leader must not change the meaning of the responses in his eagerness to clarify them. Even if the response is incorrect, the leader must not change the response, but merely make it more clear to the other members. It is likely that, as the leader clarifies an incorrect answer, the group will point out the error. This is far better than the leader to do so in the name of clarification.

***An affirmer*** ■ A key element in the discussion leader's role is his ability and willingness to be an affirmer during the process of group discussion. An affirmer is one who encourages others by demonstrating the value that he sees in each person and contribution. When a discussion participant is affirmed by the leader, he senses that both he and his contributions to the discussion are worthwhile and of value to others. Without affirmation, a person is often unsure of his worth to the group, and consequently might withhold his questions and comments from the discussion.

A discussion leader can affirm his group members in several ways. First, a discussion leader affirms by giving his attention to each person when he is speaking. Eye-to-eye contact, pleasant and inviting facial expressions and even a slight nod of the head from time to time, shows that the leader is

interested in what the participant has to say. A simple response of “Thank you,” encourages each participant by helping him see that what he said was of value to the leader.

Second, a discussion leader can affirm and encourage his group members by using their names during the discussion period. “That is a good question, Andy,” “Thank you, Andrea,” and “Lindy, what do you think of what Don has to say?” are some examples of how conscious name-dropping can contribute to the atmosphere of affirmation in the discussion group.

In affirming learners, it is important to keep the focus on the individuals rather than on their contributions. If you praise only the right answers or best responses, participants will be reticent to share, thinking that they might not give an acceptable response. But if you praise all the participants for responding, and guide them to the correct answers in the atmosphere of that affirmation, people will be willing to share their responses more readily.

The leader can affirm a participant even when he gives a wrong answer or asks a question that is off the subject. “You have hit upon an interesting idea, Glen,” the leader might say, “and I wish we had time to get into that subject now. Could we spend a few moments after class talking about it?”

Third, the leader can foster an atmosphere of affirmation in group discussion by avoiding all put-downs. “That is the silliest answer I have ever heard,” “Nice try, dummy, but that is wrong,” and “I think Hal’s answer is better than yours, Stu” are examples of put downs that can destroy the positive atmosphere that encourages openness and sharing in a discussion. Even friendly little chops can be mistaken for criticism and tear down an individual’s sense of self-worth. Accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative. Humorous put downs are not worth the few chuckles they may provoke.

## What the Discussion Leader is *Not*

Several misconceptions of the discussion leader's role are detrimental to successful Bible discussions. Though the tendency may be to gravitate toward some of these more familiar roles, they must be shunned as unproductive in the discussion process.

***An answer man*** ■ Some leaders feel that they are responsible to answer every question that arises during a discussion. They see themselves as the resident source of information. Discussion to them is simply a means of getting the learners to ask the questions that they, as leaders, are to answer. This kind of attitude can be dangerous to the success of the learning process.

The discussion process operates upon the biblical principle that the meaning of God's Word is as available to the participants as it is to the leader (see I John 2:27). God gives insight to the group members just as he gives insight to the discussion leader. This means that the participants in a discussion have as much opportunity to answer questions as the leader. The discussion leader who asserts himself as the answerer will stifle the creativity and insight of his group.

Even when the leader knows the correct answer, it is often more beneficial for him to withhold his answer for a while than to give it. When the leader, from the benefit of his research or experience, gives a quick answer to a question, he short-circuits the interaction in the group that may help individuals discover the answer for themselves. One of the golden rules of learning is, "Do not tell a learner anything you can help him discover for himself." Often a quick answer violates this rule and cheats the learner of the opportunity to solve the problem through the discussion process.

***The last word*** ■ Similar to the attitude of the answer man, some discussion leaders feel duty bound to be the final authority during the discussion. They feel the need to refute all wrong doctrine and correct every wrong answer. They cannot endure a discussion that leaves learners in question about a particular point.

A discussion group that is led by a "let me set you straight" leader will soon revert to a lecture audience. "Why should I give my views?" says a discussion member. "He is going to tell us what he wants us to know anyway. Why waste the time and effort to discuss our ideas?"

The discussion leader must present the profile of a co-learner in the discussion group. It is okay if the leader does not know all the answers--in fact, it is better if he does not. This way the

group will see him as one who is eager to learn like themselves, and as such, one who will listen to and accept their ideas.

Contrary to popular opinion, honest doubt among Bible students is often a healthy sign. It is good for a discussion leader to admit occasionally, "I have never thought of that before. I do not know what the answer is. Let's find out together." Such an admission opens a discussion group to exciting Bible study and encourages each individual to participate.

**A monopolizer** ■ The discussion leader may have been chosen for his position because he has demonstrated outstanding skill as a discussion participant. Therefore, the tendency may be for the discussion leader to be the most skilled "discusser" in the group that he leads. However, as leader, his role has changed from that of expert participant. Now his job is not to amaze his group with verbal acumen, but to assist others in developing their discussion skills.

In short, if the leader is going to encourage participation in discussion, he must discipline himself to be silent. He cannot monopolize the conversation no matter how skilled he may be in group discussion. Every statement made by the leader subtracts one statement from the group. A wise leader will reduce his comments to the absolute minimum and concentrate his energies on questions that will stimulate the group to profitable discussion.

## **Aims for Discussion: How Can They Help**

As mentioned earlier, discussion in adult Bible study is not to be seen as an end in itself. Meaningful Bible discussion must have clear aims or it becomes little more than a pooling of opinions or ignorance.

In general, Bible discussions must be in harmony with the basic goal of learning in Christian education. In Christian education, learning is any change in an individual that contributes to his or her spiritual growth. Therefore, Bible discussion is not to be seen as an activity used merely to fill 45 minutes of a Sunday morning with Bible-based chatter. Rather, each discussion must be planned to encourage specific steps of spiritual growth in the individual participants. Otherwise, it qualifies for nothing more than spiritual busywork.

## Select a Discussion Focus

The first step in outlining aims for discussion is to choose a specific *focus* for the discussion at hand. A discussion focus is a theme from the Bible text on which you want your learners to concentrate during the discussion period. For example, if your Bible text is Psalm 23, you may want to lead a discussion in the area of God's care over us as the Good Shepherd. Therefore, your discussion focus may be stated as "The Shepherding Care of God."

With a specific focus chosen, you will have a guideline to keep the discussion on track. So when someone comments on the phrase "the valley of the shadow of death" in Psalm 23:4, your discussion focus of God's shepherding care will serve as a point of reference to help you keep the discussion from going off on a tangent. "How does God show his care over us in the valley of the shadow of death?" you might ask to relate the comment to the theme. Without a discussion focus, the discussion may wander off into any of a dozen subjects. But with a specific theme in mind, you can guide the discussion to a profitable and specific conclusion.

It is important to select only one focus for each discussion even though the discussion text may contain several good discussion themes. There is generally only time enough to consider one major theme effectively in a discussion period. It is best to select one focus and do a comprehensive job of covering that theme than to select two or three themes and jump from one to the other.

## Select Three Aims

Once a discussion focus has been chosen, three specific aims for the discussion participant should be outlined: informational, analytical and personal. These aims should be carefully worded and written down to serve as a guideline for developing discussion questions for the three stages of the discussion. Furthermore, the discussion aims must be written in terms of what the leader desires the learner to achieve in the three successive stages of the discussion.

**Informational** ■ The first aim needed is an informational aim. The informational aim specifies which *facts* from the text need to be discussed by the learners. This aim is helpful in making sure the participants are guided to discover what the Scripture says about a particular theme. For example, an informational aim that is in harmony with the discussion focus for Psalm 23 mentioned above might be stated, "Guide learners to identify the terms that describe God as a shepherd." With this aim in

mind, you will be able to structure questions and comments that will help the discussion participants identify God's shepherd-like, caring qualities.

**Analytical** ■ The second aim needed is an analytical aim. Once they have identified the pertinent facts related to the discussion focus in a scripture passage, they need to be guided into a discussion of what the facts *mean* and how they apply to life today. An analytical aim designates the *concepts* and *values* the leader wants the participants to analyze during the discussion.

An analytical aim in harmony with the focus for Psalm 23 might be stated, "Guide learners to explain how people today could benefit from God's shepherding qualities." With this aim before you, your group will have a track to follow in exploring the meaning of Psalm 23.

**Personal** ■ In addition to an information aim and an analytical aim, each discussion needs a *personal* aim to guide participants to productivity. The personal aim zeroes in on the application of the Bible passage being discussed to the individual life. By including a personal goal in the discussion plan, you will help each participant assess the value of God's Word in his own life.

An example of a personal aim based on the Psalm 23 focus previously mentioned is, "Guide learners to identify one area of their lives where they need to be aware of God's shepherding care this week."

Without a personal discussion aim in mind, the discussion leader may leave his group to themselves to bridge the gap between the Bible's meaning and their own response to it. But a specific personal aim, and the questions that a personal aim dictates, will lead learners to apply to their own lives the truths of Scripture that they discovered during the discussion.

## **Discussion Questions: What Makes Them Effective?**

Ever since man discovered his capacity to speak, he has used the question as the prime tool of evoking a response from his fellow humans. Socrates was famous for his use of questions in drawing wisdom out of common folk. Jesus was a master at the use of the question. "Who do people say that I am?" (Mark 8:27); "Who do you say that I am?" (Mark 8:29); "Which of these three do you think proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell into the robbers' hands?" (Luke 10:36).

Questions are an indispensable ingredient in effective discussion, and the art of questioning is an important and necessary discussion leading skill that can be learned and improved upon with practice.

In order to prepare the participants for the discussion questions, they need to become acquainted with the Scripture text to be discussed. Even if the discussion group has been asked to read the passage at home in preparation for the discussion, it is good to reread the section just before the first question is asked.

There are several ways to read a Scripture passage with a group: (1) have the leader or another prepared reader from the class read the passage aloud while others follow along in their Bibles; (2) if all members have access to the same version, have the class read the section aloud together; (3) have prepared class members read the section dramatically; (4) have two or three people read the section from different versions of the Bible. It is important to use a variety of approaches in Scripture reading to keep this part of the discussion alive and interesting for participants.

### **Three Kinds of Questions**

There are three levels of questions that should be employed in Bible discussion. The three levels of questions correspond with the three aims of Bible discussion mentioned earlier: informational, analytical and personal.

**Informational** ■ An informational question requires the learner to remember specific facts in order to answer the question. What are the actual words of the Bible passage? When did this event take place? Who was involved in the story? What city were the apostles visiting? The answer to information questions must be available in the Bible text or other information that the learners have immediately at hand. Every learner should have an equal opportunity to answer informational questions because the information is equally available to all.

The following informational questions are based on the discussion focus and informational aim for Psalm 23 that was mentioned earlier. Notice that each question can be answered from the Bible text.

- In what occupational role does David see God in Psalm 23? (shepherd)

- What terms in Psalm 23 help emphasize the comparison of God to a good shepherd? (pastures, waters, paths, rod and staff, oil, etc.)
- What verbs in Psalm 23 describe God's action as a good shepherd? (lie down, leads, guides, etc.)

It is important to begin a discussion with a few informational questions for several reasons. First, it gives every participant an equal opportunity for contributing and thus encourages sharing. At this level, no question is too difficult for anyone. Second, informational questions insure that the discussion begins on a solid biblical foundation. This is the necessary first step to discovering what God's Word means and how it applies to life today.

When learners have difficulty answering information questions, the questioner may direct attention to specific verses where the answers to informational questions will be found. For example, if the question, "What verbs in Psalm 23 describe God in terms of a shepherd?" is only partially answered in the initial response, the questioner may ask, "Do you see any more verbs in verse 4? What do you see?" This gives participants every opportunity to answer the questions instead of being told the answers.

**Analytical** • The second level of questions, analytical questions, lead the discussion participants into dialogue on the meaning of the Bible passage under discussion. Analytical questions require learners to analyze the facts they have verbalized during the informational section of the discussion in terms of the concepts and principles that are to be found there. During the analytical stage of the discussion, learners are synthesizing information in the Bible text--and in parallel Scriptures that may be introduced in the course of the discussion--into biblical principles that apply to life today.

In the case of analytical questions, answers may not be found specifically in the Bible narrative, but may be implied in the content of the text. For example, an analytical question that may be included in the discussion of the shepherding care of God from Psalm 23 might be, "What do these verses teach you about the nature of God?" The answers that may be given--that God is seen as a loving, caring, disciplining guide--do not appear verbatim in the six verses of Psalm 23. But the descriptive words that *do* appear in the text--"I shall not want, He leads me, rod and staff," etc.--imply that God is by nature a loving, caring, disciplining guide. That correct analysis can be

substantiated by parallel Scriptures. The resourceful discussion leader will guide his learners to supportive Scriptures that validate their discoveries during the analytical phase of the discussion.

During the analytical section of a discussion, it is possible that some learners may suggest an incorrect analysis from the Scripture portion. This possibility will be minimized when the informational level questions have been thorough in preparing the discussion group for analysis.

In the event of an incorrect analysis, ask clarifying questions to help the learner identify how he arrived at his conclusion. For example, the question, “How did you arrive at that conclusion?” will provoke the learner to retrace his thinking and perhaps discover the fault in his logic. Often other members of the discussion group will see the fault and point it out. This is desirable because it keeps the burden of authority on the group rather than on you the leader. A more thorough treatment of the subject of wrong responses during discussion will be presented later in the booklet.

**Personal** • The third level of questions in discussion is personal questions. Personal questions help the learner examine his own values and apply the facts and principles discovered through informational and analytical questions to the specifics of his own life. An effective personal question will always contain the word *you* or *your*--”In what area of *your* life to *you* need to be aware of God’s shepherding care this week?” Often one or two good personal questions will be sufficient to lead learners to make personal application of the biblical material to their lives.

Caution must be exercised at this stage of the discussion due to the personal nature of the questions. Whereas in informational and analytical questions the leader is seeking group response, that is, answers that are common to each member of the group, in personal questions the leader is eliciting personal responses, answers that are unique to each individual in the group. Some believers are willing to talk unreservedly about their personal responses to Bible discussion, but others are not. Furthermore, some responses may be so deeply personal in nature that sharing them openly in a group would not benefit the individual or the group. Say, for example, that your discussion focus was the importance of pure thoughts for believers. If you ask individuals to respond to the personal question, “What areas of your thought life do you need to clean up this week?” you may be setting a match to a powder keg of personal information that needs to remain personal. You would do better to ask a question members can respond without embarrassing themselves or the group, such as, “What phrase from today’s discussion Scripture passage do you specially need to put into practice

this week?” This question allows each individual to focus on God’s specific message to him that day without unnecessarily revealing personal information.

Here is a good rule of thumb for all levels of discussion questions, but particularly for questions at the personal level. Always allow members the option of passing (*i.e.*, not commenting) on any questions that may be asked. If learners feel they will be put on the spot by being forced to answer a question, they may avoid attending all future discussions. Learners need to feel that their responses are welcome, but that no pressure will be placed upon them to participate in the discussion. This may mean that some of your discussion group members will not participate. But it is far better that some remain in the group without commenting than be driven from the group completely by unnecessary pressure. Furthermore, there are positive ways to encourage participation that will not threaten or intimidate learners. Tips for involving nonparticipants will be discussed later in the booklet.

### **Plan Questions in Advance**

The most successful discussions are not spontaneous; they are carefully planned. It is to your advantage as a discussion leader to write down your discussion focus, aims and questions in the sequence that you will use them. Written questions insure that your discussion will stay on track. You may think of additional questions during the course of the discussion, but your planned sequence will provide you a secure framework of reference.

Avoid questions that can be answered yes or no. Questions of this nature do not promote discussion, they stifle it. Discussion questions should provoke members to explain, illustrate, defend or clarify a biblical principle. A yes or no answer accomplishes none of these tasks. A yes or no type question is only appropriate when it is followed by, “Why” or “Why not?” to stimulate some thought on the issue.

Once you have written focus, aims and questions, transfer the questions to a small card or sheet of paper that will fit compactly into your Bible. It will be easier for you and less distracting for your class members if you follow a concise outline of questions than fumble through a sheaf of notes. You need not be embarrassed about using notes to lead a discussion. You and your learners will discover that following a guideline to achieve productivity in discussion far outweighs whatever value the appearance of spontaneity may hold.

## How to Start and Stop

The effectiveness of a Bible discussion can be increased when the leader knows how to get the discussion started and how to bring the discussion to a meaningful conclusion. Special care must be taken that participants are invited into the discussion atmosphere in a way that makes them want to participate. Furthermore, the discussion must conclude in a manner that helps the individual gain the most personal value from the discussion. Therefore, it is suggested that each discussion have as its bookends an approach activity and a conclusion activity.

**Approach** • The objective of an approach activity is to help the participants focus their attention on the theme of the discussion. The approach activity serves as a buffer between the arrival of the class and the first informational question. It acclimates the discussion group to the basic subject matter of the topic they will be discussing from the discussion text.

An approach activity (approximately five minutes in duration) can be as simple as a question or as involved as a brief creative assignment. For example, here are some approach activities that can be used to introduce a discussion of God's shepherding care from Psalm 23:

- Ask the group to imagine they are sheep and answer the question, "What are the qualities of a good shepherd?"
- Prearrange a staged interview with one of the group members as David comparing himself as a shepherd to God.
- Give individuals a sheet of blank paper and have them tear their paper into a shape that represents for them the word *caring*.
- Discuss the following question in circle response (each person speaks once around the circle without interruption by others): "What do you think of when you hear the word *caring*?"

Notice how each approach activity leads into a Bible discussion of Psalm 23 and God's shepherding care. By the time the approach activity has concluded, each member's interest is aroused and he is ready to dig into the Word for some biblical principles.

**Conclusion** • What do you do after the last personal level question has been asked? How do you wrap up the discussion in a meaningful way for each participant? One way is by planning a brief conclusion activity to help each group member make specific application of the principles that were explored and discovered during the discussion. The conclusion activity helps each person answer the

question, “What am I going to do with what I have learned?”

A conclusion activity may range from a brief prayer in pairs or threes to outlining a project to be followed up during the succeeding week. Here are some conclusion activities that could be used effectively to wrap up the discussion of God’s shepherding care from Psalm 23:

- Have the group gather in clusters of three and pray for each other, particularly for the areas in their lives in which they need God’s care today.
- Give each person paper and pencil, and invite everyone to write a letter of thanks to God for the element of his shepherding care that they appreciate most.
- Give each person a small index card to write a prayer request regarding God’s care over him this week. Collect the cards and put them in a coffee can. Each person then draws out of the can a prayer request that he promises to remember in the coming week.

With a little bit of thought, the leader can create a brief conclusion activity to help each learner draw some personal conclusions and designate for himself some personal responses to what he has learned during the discussion.

## **Discussion Problems: How Are They Handled?**

It would be nice if we could say that every Bible discussion would proceed exactly as planned to the desired conclusion. But even after careful, prayerful study and preparation, some parts of the discussion may not turn out as planned. The problems below are some of the most common that occur during a discussion. Several helpful suggestions are offered on how to handle each problem as it arises.

### **What If Nobody Responds to the Question?**

There are several reasons why a discussion question may draw a blank response from your group. In each case, there are steps that can be taken to remedy the situation.

*The meaning of the question may be unclear* • It is a good idea to ask, “Is my question clear?” if the question is greeted by blank stares or silence. Be ready to rephrase the question to help participants grasp exactly what you want them to deal with.

*Participants may need time to think* • The leader may have discovered several good answers to the question posed during his personal research. But the participants have just heard the question for the first time! They need time to assess what they think and how they will respond.

The leader can reassure the group during silence by saying, “Think about it for a moment and I will wait for your response.” When learners know that silence is not a threat to the leader, they will be more relaxed about taking a few seconds to think through their answer.

*Some participants may be shy about speaking in a group* • Make sure that group members know they are not required to participate in the discussion. With the atmosphere of voluntary participation, there are several ways the leader can encourage even shy learners to take part in the discussion. One way is to announce, “We would really like to have everyone’s responses and ideas on this subject. Your ideas may help us understand more. Who else will share at this point?”

Another way is to watch for body gestures from participants that suggest they want to inject a comment but may need a little coaxing. A person leaning forward, a slightly open mouth, a furrowed brow or nod may indicate a desire to say something. The leader may encourage the shy learner through eye-to-eye contact, a warm smile and perhaps the question, “Were you about to say something, Frank?”

Another way to deal with a shy participant is to speak to him encouragingly in private. “Mark, I know you are a thoughtful person and I am sure you have some good ideas. I think the group would like to hear them. How can I encourage you to share your thoughts in class?”

### **What if Someone Monopolizes the Discussion?**

Occasionally a discussion group is frustrated and annoyed by an individual who has a comment (or series of comments) for every question or point of discussion. His comments may be good, but he short-circuits the contributions of other members by his incessant talking. Such a person may have a need for recognition that is easily met by the convenience of the discussion group. Whatever the reason, the discussion group suffers if his need for attention, recognition or esteem in the eyes of others takes precedence over the success of the group experience.

There are several ways of handling the excessive talker in the discussion group. Since; his talking in the group often reveals a need for attention to some degree, it is important that these suggestions be carried out with plenty of *tender loving care*.

***Give general group guidelines for participation*** • The leader can often alleviate the problem of one excessive talker by making general instructions to the discussion group about how individuals should participate. The leader might announce, “In order to give everyone an opportunity to participate in the discussion, let’s operate with the general rule that no one can speak twice on a point until everyone else in the group has been given the opportunity to speak once.” Make sure that you couch the announcement in language that is not offensive to the individual you are trying to restrain.

***Enlist the offender’s aid in the group*** • Another way to solve the problem is to ask the excessive talker to help you involve the others in the group. In private, the leader might say to him, “Joe, you have very good ideas to share during our discussions and you seem to feel quite free about expressing them. Sometimes others in the group hold back waiting for you to speak. You could help me involve the others by holding back yourself until some of the others have spoken. Perhaps you could even encourage them to share their ideas. It would be very helpful to me if you could do that.”

***Confront the problem person straight on*** • When all else fails, the leader must confront the offender directly about the problem he is causing in the group. The individual must be told lovingly but firmly that he is taking discussion time away from other members through his excessive participation. Request that he cooperate with the goals of group discussion by limiting his contributions and encouraging the participation of others. Such a confrontation is often difficult for the group leader. But the health and success of the discussion group must take preference over the undisciplined member. When subtler methods fail, it is imperative that individuals be dealt with.

### **What if Someone’s Comment is Irrelevant to the Discussion?**

Be careful that you do not judge a statement as being *off track* too quickly. The comment may be relevant to the topic at hand to everyone but you! The main objective for the leader is to understand what the learner meant by the comment and how it relates to the discussion topic.

***Affirm the contributor*** • Always make a point to thank the speaker for his comment in an affirmative way. “That is an interesting thought; I have never thought of that before.” The trick is to affirm the participant without encouraging the tangential subject he wants to discuss.

***Relate the comment to the discussion theme*** • After expressing affirmative words for the contributor, the leader must establish a link between the comment and the discussion theme (if one exists) and pull the discussion back on track. The most direct approach is to ask, “Would you help us see how you understand this relates to the theme of our discussion today?” If the comment is irrelevant to the discussion, the contributor will often admit so in response to the question. If it *is* relevant, the leader’s question will open the door for the comment to become relevant to the rest of the group.

Another way to relate the *off track* comment to the theme is for the leader to rephrase the comment in terms that pull the groups thinking back on the discussion track. For example, if the discussion focus is God’s shepherding care and someone injects a comment about wanting to quit his job, the leader might say, “There are many times in our lives, like the experience that Bryan has just described, where we need to be aware of God’s care over us in spite of circumstances. That brings us back to Psalm 23.”

The other members in the discussion group can often assist you in getting the discussion back on track after an irrelevant comment or question. The leader can take advantage of the group by asking something like, “Dorothy, how would you respond to Eileen’s comment in the light of what we have been discussing?” Hopefully some of the class members will be able to see a way to tie the *off track* statement into the discussion theme or help you kindly dismiss it as irrelevant to the topic.

## **What if Someone Gives a Wrong Answer?**

First, we must define a wrong answer. A wrong answer to an informational question is easy to spot. The Bible text gives specific information and answers are recognizable as wrong or right from the text. For example, if your informational question is, “How many cities of refuge did God instruct Joshua to establish?” and someone answers, “Five,” the Bible text enumerating *six* cities of refuge proves that answer to be wrong.

But for an analytical question, an answer may be more a matter of biblical interpretation, and as such, not as easy to declare right or wrong. Wrong answers would most easily be identified as those that contradict church doctrine or established interpretation of Scripture.

Furthermore, a wrong answer for an analytical question may be one that does not focus on the discussion theme. Say, for example, the discussion focus is again God's shepherding care and the analytical question is, "What do these verses teach you about the nature of God?" If a participant responds by saying, "This teaches me that God is a God of judgment because he uses a rod." The answer may be technically correct, but it does not chime in with the discussion focus of God's shepherding care. In a sense, then, the answer is wrong.

A wrong answer for questions at the personal level is even more difficult to identify. The nature of the personal level questions is such that the participants must find an answer that is right for them. The standard for right or wrong is the individual and God's personal message to him during a Bible discussion. For example, if the question is "In what area of your life do you need to be aware of God's shepherding care this week?" it is conceivable that individuals will have a different answer--all of them being right.

There are several good ways of responding to a wrong answer and guiding learners to correct answers. Again, it is of the utmost importance to affirm the learner for contributing to the discussion. If the leader's response infers anything like, "That was a dumb answer," it is unlikely that the individual will want to respond again.

***Ask the participant to retrace his steps*** • One way to handle a wrong answer during discussion is to encourage the individual to explain how he arrived at his conclusion. The leader's question might sound something like this: "Your response interests me. How did you happen to come to that conclusion?" Often in the course of explaining his logic, the wrong answerer will discover his erroneous thinking, or another member of the group will point it out to him.

If it is an informational question, the person with the wrong response needs to be redirected to the Scripture passage for correction. The leader might say, "Let's see how the verse puts it" or "Let's see how our text explains it, making sure we understand."

If the wrong response is given to an analytical question, the learner needs to explain to the group how he derived his concepts or principles from the text at hand or supplementary material.

***Ask the participant to research his response*** • If the discussion member gives a wrong answer that he cannot document, the leader might suggest that they keep the answer *on the back burner* until the answering participant (and/or other group members) do some research to validate the response. The issue can be quickly resolved during a subsequent class period as the researchers present their findings. Hopefully, they have uncovered their erroneous thinking and are ready to admit it.

***Do some personal research on the erroneous point*** • If the wrong answer or comment is of such a serious nature that it requires the leader's personal attention, he might do research on the issue himself and bring back a report. The leader might respond, "That is an interesting comment and I am not sure I know how to respond. I would like to do some studying on that point in order to respond more intelligently to what you said."

## **What if Two or More Participants Disagree During Discussion?**

One of the risks of opening discussion to a group is the possibility of disagreement among some of the group members. Someone will express an opinion on a topic and someone else will say, "I disagree with that. I believe this way." A disagreement between two or more group members can delay the progress of the discussion and cause other group members to feel left out until the disagreement is settled. Therefore, it is important for the group leader to remedy the situation quickly so that the group can continue toward the discussion focus.

***Clarify the issues in disagreement*** • Many disagreements are primarily a matter of semantics. One member disagrees with another's way of stating a point, but in reality, they agree on the issue itself. In such a case, the leader needs to ask, "Elaine, what did you hear Pat saying? Would you summarize what you heard in your own words?" When Elaine summarizes what she heard Pat say, Pat may respond, "Oh, I am sorry, that is not what I meant. I really meant to say the opposite." The technique of having members feed back in their own words what they hear often solves the problem of apparent disagreement

***Deal with wrong answers causing disagreement*** • Two members may disagree because one has discovered the correct answer to a question while the other is stuck on a wrong answer. When the leader perceives the dilemma, he should ask each person to explain how he arrived at his

conclusion, as suggested under the topic of dealing with wrong answers. If in their explanations the disagreement remains unsolved, follow the other steps suggested for wrong answers.

*Settle persisting disagreements out of class* • If the two preceding suggestions fail to dissolve the disagreement, the leader may need to postpone the solution of the problem until after the discussion period. The disagreement cannot deter the group from the discussion aims. The leader must eventually say, "I see that you both have strong feelings on this issue. This is a question that we cannot settle here. Perhaps we could discuss this further after our discussion period has come to a close."

The key to resolving discussion problems is anticipation and preparation. Very few discussions are problem free; one or more of the problems discussed in this booklet are likely to appear. The discussion leader must prepare for the problems by preparing his responses. A few prearranged questions or responses for some of the problem areas will equip the leader to smooth over a problem spot in discussion and continue toward the discussion goals.

# Appendix

## Discussion Text: Psalm 23:1-6

### Informational Aim

Guide your learners to identify the terms that describe God as a shepherd

### Informational Questions

1. In what occupational role does David see God in Psalm 23?
2. What terms in Psalm 23 emphasize the comparison of God to a good shepherd?
3. What verbs in Psalm 23 describe God's action as a good shepherd?

### Analytical Aim

Guide learners to explain how people today can benefit from God's shepherding qualities.

### Analytical Questions

1. What do these verses teach you about the nature of God?
2. What do these verses teach you about the nature of man?
3. In what ways are people today in need of God's shepherding care?

### Personal Aim

Guide learners to select one area of their lives where they need to be aware of God's shepherding care this week.

### Personal Questions

1. How has God exercised his shepherding care over your life recently?
2. In what area of your life do you need to be aware of God's shepherding care this week?

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**Discussion Focus**  
God cares for us like a good shepherd.

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## Discussion Text: James 1:1-8

### Informational Aim

Guide learners to list the biblical response to trials they encounter.

### Informational Questions

1. What ways does James instruct Christians to handle the trials they encounter?
2. What results does James promise when a believer responds to trials correctly?
3. What happens when a person asks for wisdom but does not believe God will provide it?

### Analytical Aim

Guide learners to explain the importance of rejoicing, wisdom and faith in handling trials.

### Analytical Questions

1. Why is it important for a person to rejoice in his trials? What keeps Christians today from rejoicing in trials?
2. Why is it important to ask for wisdom in trials? What keeps Christians today from asking for wisdom?
3. Why is it important to have faith when asking for wisdom? What keeps Christians from believing that God supplies wisdom?

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### Discussion Focus

How to handle trials.

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### Personal Aim

Guide learners to describe one trial in their lives they need to handle in a scriptural way.

### Personal Questions

1. When have you experienced trials and made the right responses? What were the results?
2. In what area of your life are you presently facing trials? What response do you need to make to your present trials?



## Discussion Text: Joshua 20:1-9

### Informational Aim

Guide learners to define the purpose and function of the cities of refuge.

### Analytical Aim

Guide learners to compare the function of the cities of refuge with the refuge offered to believers in Christ today.

### Personal Aim

Guide learners to determine the aspect of God's refuge they need in their lives today.

### Information Questions

1. What was the purpose of the cities of refuge?
2. Whose idea was it to designate cities of refuge?
3. What was the refuge city's responsibility toward the unintentional man-slayer?

### Analytical Questions

1. What does the establishment of the cities of refuge tell you about the nature of God?
2. How was the geographic location of the six cities a benefit to the people?
3. What are some areas of life today from which believers need refuge?

### Personal Questions

1. In what ways has God provided refuge for you personally?
2. Imagine you are an unintentional manslayer approaching a city of refuge with an avenger hot on your trail. What would be some of your thoughts and feelings? Do you ever have those kinds of thoughts and feelings as you approach God for refuge? Explain.
3. Would someone be willing to share an area where you feel a need for God's refuge?

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**Discussion Focus**  
God is our refuge.

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# Discussion Questions

1. Compare the definition of discussion in this booklet with Bible discussions in which you have participated. What are the similarities? What are the dissimilarities?
2. Review the components that describe the discussion leader's role. Rate your current level of skill for each on a scale of 1 (poor) to 10 (excellent). If possible, ask a trusted Christian friend who has observed you as a leader to rate you also. Then compare notes.
3. Practice makes perfect. Select a brief section of Scripture and follow the prescribed steps in preparation of a Bible discussion on that text:
  - Select a discussion focus.
  - Select three aims.
  - Write at least three questions at each level (informational, analytical and personal)  
(Compare your focus, aims and questions with the examples in the appendix.)
4. Once your discussion is planned, decide on an approach activity to introduce the topic and a conclusion activity to help participants apply what they have learned to their own lives.
5. Review the list of discussion problems, noting the sample responses given. Write two or three additional responses you might give in each situation.
6. Invite a small group of Christian friends to join you for a Bible study. Mention that you would like them to evaluate your discussion leading skills. Lead them in the discussion you have prepared (see 3 and 4). After the discussion, explain your discussion format and ask for their constructive feedback.

## Agree-Disagree

### Purpose

To stimulate interest in a topic by proposing a series of purposefully controversial statements on a given subject. Class members indicate whether they agree or disagree with the statements and why.

### Materials

- A handout sheet, flipchart or chalkboard on which a series of statements is written

### Procedure

1. Teacher asks students to read statements and determine if they agree or disagree.
2. Teacher reads statements aloud and asks students who agree to raise hands; then students who disagree.
3. Teacher calls attention to a statement on which opinion was divided and asks someone who agreed to tell why. Then someone who disagreed may speak. Allow several to speak for each side until differing positions have been clarified.
4. Continue this procedure with other statements as time allows.
5. Conclude the activity by affirming the group for honestly disagreeing without becoming disagreeable. Then lead group to Scripture passage to be studied.

### Variations

1. Students may be asked to stand if they agree and to remain seated if they disagree.
2. All of group may be asked to stand. Those agreeing go to one side of room and the others to the other side, with *undecided* in the middle.
3. The group may be asked to divide based on *strongly agree, moderately agree, strongly disagree, and moderately disagree*.
4. After the group has been divided, they may try to convince the others of their position. Students may change sides at any time during such discussion.

### Examples

- Christian kids should not be close friends with non-Christians.
- The parent, not the child, is more responsible for the actions and outcome of the child.
- Minority individuals should be given first consideration for jobs to help make up for years of unequal employment treatment.

## Brainstorming

### Purpose

To suggest as many ideas as possible on a given subject or problem with no evaluation made until all ideas are presented.

### Materials

- Chalkboard, flipchart, large sheet of paper on which to record ideas
- Chalk, felt pen

### Procedure

1. Announce that the group is going to brainstorm for five minutes (generally a short time of three to five minutes works best)
2. Instruct the learners that in brainstorming the idea is to come up with as many ideas as possible in the shortest time with no one evaluating an idea.
3. Assign someone in each group, or in the large group, to write down all the suggestions.
4. Announce the subject matter and begin timing.

### Variations

1. Brainstorming works best in small groups of at least four to six persons, but may be used in smaller groups.
2. After the brainstorming is concluded, some evaluation may be made of the various suggestions, depending on the purpose for the brainstorming.

### Examples

1. What are the characteristics of an ideal parent? Child?
2. What are some of the ways we *trust in God*?
3. What is God like?
4. What are the characteristics of a Christian?
5. How many ways can we witness?
6. Come up with a list of objections people may have to the gospel.
7. Think of at least five ways we show preferential treatment to some believers and not to others.

## Circle Response

### Purpose

To engage each student in the discussion and participation in the lesson.

### Materials

- Sheet of butcher paper, chalkboard, flipchart on which is written question, statement or verse(s) of Scripture.

### Procedure

1. The teacher calls the students' attention to the question, statement or verses(s).
2. Each learner is asked to respond.
3. This works best if the learners are sitting in a circle.
4. No one may speak a second time until all have spoken once.

### Variations

1. If the group is large, smaller circles (4-8) of learners may be used.
2. When several circles are formed, different questions or statements may be used in each group and a report made on the general consensus in each group.
3. A listening team may be appointed in a group to be prepared to summarize the consensus of the group.

### Examples

- What was Christ's greatest miracle and why?
- What was Christ's greatest statement and why?
- Why did Christ have such a short ministry?
- Why might you consider Jesus a rebel?
- Of the events in Jesus' life here on earth, which was the most significant to you and why?
- Which one characteristic of Jesus would you most seek or identify with and why?
- What do you think Christ was doing from age 12 to age 30?
- Why might someone decline Jesus' invitation to come, be my disciple?
- What was the second most significant event in the life of Christ? Why?
- What impresses you most as to how Christ conducted himself?
- What was the most important moment in the lives of Christ's disciples? Why?

## Buzz Groups

### Purpose

To allow small groups to discuss a given subject for a brief period of time.

### Materials

- Paper and pencils for note taking
- A written statement of the subject to be discussed

### Procedure

1. Small groups of four to six are formed in a circle.
2. A written statement of the subject to be discussed is handed out.
3. A time limit is set for the discussion--usually 3 to 20 minutes.
4. A recorder is chosen to record the group's results.

### Variations

1. There are hosts of variations that can be used with this format.
  - a. It can be used like the brainstorming session to develop some ways of coping with a problem, describing a concept or subject, or developing a project.
  - b. It can be used to study a particular Scripture to discover a meaning, list items, or develop an application.
2. Comparisons between the results from each group can be valuable in the development of workable ideas, in-depth Bible study, setting of priorities, or application of Scripture to life situations.

### Examples

1. Make a list of the main areas of temptation Christian adults face today. Be prepared to share them with the group.
2. Read John 2:1-14. Come up with a list of things that God the Father or God the Son did. Then make a list of possible responses from man.
3. Tell why cheating on your income taxes is, or is not, harmful.

# Elder Team Monthly Report

Elder Team \_\_\_\_\_

For the month of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_

Caregiver	Phone Contacts	Mail Contacts	Personal Contacts
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			
Elder Team contacts			
<b>TOTALS</b>			

*(Back of card)*

Our Koinonia was on (date during report month) \_\_\_\_\_

at (location) \_\_\_\_\_

There were \_\_\_\_\_ attending. Our next Koinonia is scheduled for \_\_\_\_\_

During the month we made the following contacts with our Caregivers \_\_\_\_\_

Something good happening in our CDG is \_\_\_\_\_

Our prayer request for this month is \_\_\_\_\_

Comments or needs \_\_\_\_\_

## Caregiver Monthly Report

Elder Team \_\_\_\_\_

Caregiver \_\_\_\_\_ For the month of \_\_\_\_\_, 20\_\_\_\_

Care Group	Phone Contacts	Mail Contacts	Personal Contacts
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			
7.			
8.			

I would like to bring the following information to my Elder Team's attention: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Family Information

Family Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City, State, Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone \_\_\_\_\_

Elder Assignment and date \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

### Family Members

Name	Date of Birth	Date Joined	Spiritual Gift

Wedding anniversary: \_\_\_\_\_

Head of household occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Business firm: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Work Phone/him \_\_\_\_\_ Work Phone/her \_\_\_\_\_

Spouse's occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

Business firm: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Other helpful information

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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