

Small Group Summit: What Makes It Worth it All

Prayerful Outcomes

1. Each person would have encountered God in a significant, renewing way.
2. Everyone would have a clear, compelling idea of where the River small group ministry is going, e.g. shepherd leaders, hospitality/outreach, mission, healing, union, towards love one another 24/7 X. centered community.
3. Leaders would be wrestling with “am I called to be a shepherd leader?”
4. Non-leaders would be wrestling with or clear on, “am I called into a shepherd role?” “What is my role in my small group/team towards Biblical small group life?”
5. Coaches and staff would have met with God and developed as a community of ministry through the event.
6. There would be a clear path for both groups of folks and their groups coming out of the retreat.

Intro:

- What comes to mind first when you picture the word “church”?
- How is this picture of church related to the New Testament’s picture?
- How does it compare to Going to Church in the First Century? What struck you the most from that reading?

I. What is the church? A Working Biblical definition

A Group of people united by the experience of Jesus Christ through the Spirit

- which produces a Christ centered community through devotion and laying down one’s life love for one another and unbelievers
- so that the Body is built up through each member functioning and all God’s gifts being expressed and
- sends out missional teams,
- all to the glory of God.

What is our Entry? Our Unity?

1. Acts 2:37-41

Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" ³⁸And Peter said to them, "Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.

2. John 7:37-39

On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. ³⁸Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" ³⁹Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

3. Romans 8:8-9, 15-16

Those who are in the flesh cannot please God. ⁹You, however, are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you. Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.

¹⁵For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the Spirit of adoption as children, by whom we cry, "Abba! Father!" ¹⁶The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

4. I Corinthians 12:3, 12-13

³Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit.

¹²For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. ¹³For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body— Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and all were made to drink of one Spirit.

II. This experience naturally leads to a “laying down one’s life” kind of love and devoted “whole life” Christ centered community.

A. *Laying one’s life down kind of love*

1. John 15:11-15

¹¹These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full. ¹²"This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. ¹³Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴You are my friends if you do what I command you. ¹⁵No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.

2. 1 John 3:14-17

¹⁴ We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love each other. Anyone who does not love remains in death. ¹⁵ Anyone who hates a fellow believer is a murderer, and you know that no murderers have eternal life in them. ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for one another. ¹⁷ If any one of you has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in you? ¹⁸ Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth.

- Do I have a group of people that I “lay my life down with”?
- Am I still focused on my rights and pleasures?
- What causes me to hold back from laying down my life?

B. *Devotion*

1. What is devotion?

- a) Ardent, often selfless affection and dedication, as to a person or principle.
- b) profound dedication; consecration.
- c) earnest attachment to a cause, person, etc

2. Acts 2:42

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

3. Rom. 12:10

Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves.

- I have a group of people I can point to whose physical and spiritual needs/growth I am pursuing with my time, energy, and money.
- They are devoted to me in the same way.
- I will not abandon these people except under the most dire and grievous Biblical reason.

C. *Whole life: towards 7-day-a-week Christ centered community*

1. **Koinonia** (fellowship) in Acts 2:42 and elsewhere refers to sharing life together. The apostolic church shared all of life, not just Sunday AM –

Finances in Acts and Paul's letters were shared according to need. They shared their time away from work, especially meals.

2. **Community according to Jesus:** Whole life community learned with Jesus. Jesus taught them life over 3 years of living 7-day a week community.

D. Christ Centered community vs. human love centered, compassion centered, fun centered, mutual support centered.

1. **A community is defined by its center and its story.**

Ex. Extended family community

Ex. Sports centered community

2. **Christ Centered community centers and abides on the person of Jesus and the story of his ongoing presence in the world in the Body of Christ, among us, and at distance.**

- The authoritative story of Jesus in the Gospels
- The authoritative teaching on the person and work of Jesus in the entire Bible.
- The inspiring and instructive story of and authoritative apostolic teaching to his Body, the Church.
- The story and work of Jesus that is your immediate community.
- The story and work of Jesus that is your individual life.
- Jesus' wider work in history, around the world, and across cultures and social barriers.

Summary: Here is the kind of love that is foundational for Biblical church life.

1. This love is a supernatural work of God, though it does take the will, the whole self to build habits and skills, to cooperate with the Spirit.
2. This love depends on the ongoing experience of the Holy Spirit, the love of God, the power of God, the character of God.
3. This love involves a specific group of people, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, and spiritual children, a family, as well as the unchurched and unbelieving.
4. This love involves a huge commitment to a group of brothers and sisters. I mean huge.
5. This love means that our highest ambition is to see Jesus glorified in these people at the last Day.

We have not said anything about how the church meets, organizes itself, or owning property!

III. Q: How is this possible? A: This is only possible in small groups!

- A. One another commands*
- B. Specific group of people, not general/large/vague. They must also lay life down for me so it's not me as center of hub of disconnected spokes.*
- C. The New Testament is not an idealist's book, filled with illusions about how easy this is. It is a life of death and resurrection following a crucified and glorified Lord by faith.*

IV. Worth it all

A. Making Jesus known

1 John 4:12-13

¹² No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us. (among us)¹³ By this we know that we abide in him and he in us, because he has given us of his Spirit.

B. Jesus gains glory

John 13:32-35

³²If God is glorified in him, God will also glorify him in himself, and glorify him at once. ³³Little children, yet a little while I am with you . . . ³⁴A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. ³⁵ By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

John 17:20-23

²⁰"I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me. ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.

C. *We receive glory in Jesus receiving glory*

1 Thessalonians 2:17-19

¹⁷But since we were torn away from you, brothers, for a short time, in person not in heart, we endeavored the more eagerly and with great desire to see you face to face, ¹⁸because we wanted to come to you—I, Paul, again and again—but Satan hindered us. ¹⁹For what is our hope or joy or crown of boasting before our Lord Jesus at his coming? Is it not you? ²⁰For you are our glory and joy.

V. *Barriers, Setbacks, Struggles*

A. *No experience of the Holy Spirit. Community is then based in church rules, duty/service, or our distinctives, e.g. theological, music, etc. At best it's in genuine seeking of God, but not stemming from relationship with the Triune God through the Spirit.*

B. *Barrier of individualism, the poverty of love.*

In the West there is loneliness, which I call the leprosy of the West. In many ways it is worse than our poor in Calcutta.

Mother Theresa (*Commonweal*, Dec 19, 1997)

- As Americans we are handicapped from the start by individualism, careerism, consumerism (property, goods, services, retirement) which leads to a doom loop of isolation, loneliness, unsafe intimacy binging/purging, poor social skills, despair, etc.
- We have other agendas besides laying down our lives that we wrestle with in the world, the flesh, and the devil. We are programmed for this.
- We purchase (or attempt to) what the early church did by love. e.g. Priscilla and Aquila's guest room vs. hotels for guests.

C. *Sub-biblical church experiences*

1. Church as an audience for a Christian celebration (teaching & worship) without "whole life Christian community laying down life kind of love"
Q: Is it real or just an emotional/cognitive high? Is it persistent or just when I am in the meeting?

2. Church as a school for Bible knowledge, wisdom to live our lives by, for doctrinal purity.
3. Church as a fortress against the culture to raise our kids in, to wait for Jesus' coming, to be safe in our group (family clan, ethnic group, denominational group, etc.)
4. You name it . . .

D. Hurt by the Family of Origin and/or the Family of God

1. Parents and authority figures we trusted in a vulnerable stage of life.
2. Disillusioned by our wish dream, by leaders who went down or harmed the sheep.
3. Friends who betrayed our trust.
4. Hurt by sheep we tried to lead – constant critique, indignation, and fleeing/walking away.

E. Worn down by life and loving

1. Violating the Sabbath principle.
2. No Solitude, no recharge with the Holy Spirit in the inner life.

Proverbs 4:23

Above all else, guard your heart, for from it are the springs of life.

Luke 5:15-17

Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. ¹⁶But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

Ephesians 5:17-21

Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is. ¹⁸And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit, ¹⁹addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, ²⁰giving thanks always and for everything to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, ²¹submitting to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Resources:

Robert Banks, *Paul's Idea of Community: The Early House Churches in their Historical Setting*.
Gordon Fee. *God's Empowering Presence*.