

THE PURPOSE OF THE VITAL GROUPS AND AN OVERVIEW OF THE LIVING CONTENTS OF THE VITAL GROUPS

- The purpose of the vital groups is to live the kingdom life in the church life, where a sinning one could be restored by prayer in harmony
- The purpose of the vital groups is fruit-bearing for the increase, perfecting, and building up of the church
- The living contents of the vital group practice include prayer, fellowship, and intercession for one another, mutual teaching through asking and answering questions, and prayer and consideration of whom we should contact for the gospel and shepherding

The Purpose of the Vital Groups Being to Live the Kingdom Life in the Church Life

The purpose of the vital groups is to live two kinds of lives: the kingdom life and the church life...We need to read and consider prayerfully the Lord's speaking in Matthew 18:15-22, which reveals how we can live the kingdom life. Verses 15 through 17 say, "Moreover if your brother sins against you, go, reprove him between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more, that by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to hear the church also, let him be to you just like the Gentile and the tax collector." If this sinning one would not listen even to the church, what should we do? The text says that we should let him be to us like the Gentile and the tax collector, that is, like an unsaved person who is outside the fellowship of the church.

Verse 18 then says, "Truly I say to you, Whatever you bind on the earth shall have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on the earth shall have been loosed in heaven." We have to see the connection between verses 17 and 18. Verse 17 is so low, saying that we should let the sinning one who will not listen to the church be to us like a Gentile and a tax collector. But verse 18 says that we should touch heaven by our binding and releasing prayer. This is the prayer of the vital group. Verse 19 says, "Again, truly I say to you that if two of you are in harmony on earth concerning any matter for which they ask, it will be done for them from My Father who is in the heavens." This is the practice of a vital group of two or three in harmony touching the very God in heaven. These are the two or three mentioned in verse 16: "But if he does not hear you, take with you one or two more..." These are the members of a vital group.

If a brother sins against us, we need to deal with him first in love. If we cannot get through, we should bring with us one or two more to contact him. If we still cannot get through, we should tell it to the church, and if the church cannot get through, then the sinning brother will lose the fellowship of the church. But this is not all. We have to then pray in the way of binding and releasing, and we have to pray in harmony. Whatever we pray, our Father in heaven will accomplish to gain that person. Verse 20 says, "For where there are two or three gathered into My name, there am I in their midst." This is the reality of the vital groups.

A vital group is a real representation of the church. The church should learn how to deal with a sinning one by the example of Paul. Paul did not have the peace when this sinful one was removed, so he still did something to take care of the situation. The most important thing is to cherish and forgive. To visit is to cherish. Paul sent Titus to visit Corinth in order to cherish the Corinthians. Then Paul told them to forgive. Forgiving should follow cherishing. Then we can recover and gain people. (*The Vital Groups*, Chapter 1)

The Purpose of the Vital Groups Being Fruit-Bearing for the Increase, Perfecting, and Building Up of the Church

The purpose of the vital groups is the increase, perfecting, and building up of the Body of Christ (Acts 2:46-47; Eph. 4:12). The vital groups are to gain the increase, finish the perfecting, and complete the building...Acts 2:46-47 says, "Day by day, continuing steadfastly with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they partook of their food with exultation and simplicity of heart, praising God and having grace with all the people. And the Lord added together day by day those who were being saved." This is the normal standard of the Christian life. (*Fellowship concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, Chapter 7)

John 12:12 through John 17 is one section on the multiplication of Christ. Many readers of the Bible have never seen this secret of understanding this section. The crucial and controlling verse in this section is John 12:24. The Lord Jesus likened Himself to a grain of wheat that falls into the ground and dies. This one grain then becomes many grains, which are the multiplication of that one grain. John 15 presents a full picture of the organism of the Triune God. How good, how miraculous, how wonderful, and how excellent it is that we all are a part of this organism! Christ is here as this organism, and we are included in this organism. He is the tree, and we are the branches...The branches need the tree, and the tree needs the branches for what purpose? It is not only for the purpose of our enjoying the wonderful, excellent, and marvelous divine life. Eventually, the purpose of this divine organism is fruit-bearing.

Fruit-bearing is the multiplication and the enlargement of this divine tree, the divine organism of the processed Triune God.

We all have to be the fruitful branches of this vine tree. Fruit-bearing is the unique and particular characteristic of all the branches of the divine organism. All of us need a new start, a new turn, so we all have to consecrate ourselves anew. We all need a renewed consecration for the purpose of fruit-bearing. Suppose a branch of a vine tree bears only one piece of fruit. This branch will not look very nice, because the branches of a vine tree should bear clusters of fruit. As branches of Christ, we have to bear clusters of fruit. A vine tree is good for only one purpose—the purpose of bearing fruit. We have been chosen as the branches of Christ for the unique purpose of bearing fruit. Many of us have to admit, however, that instead of bearing fruit, we have been barren for years. [We must] find a way to bear fruit.

The danger of not bearing fruit is to be cut off from the enjoyment of the vine (John 15:2a). The Lord says clearly that if we are branches not bearing fruit, we are in danger of being cut off from the vine tree. This does not mean that we will suffer eternal perdition. To be cut off from Christ here is to be cut off from the enjoyment of the riches of Christ. As the branches abide in the vine tree, they enjoy its life supply. If a branch is cut off from the vine tree, it is cut off from enjoying the riches of the vine tree. When we are barren, not bearing fruit, we have the sensation that we are not enjoying Christ that much. There is hardly any enjoyment of Christ. This indicates that we have been cut off from the vine tree. I have received many letters telling me that visiting people for the gospel not only saved sinners but also revived the visiting ones. This means that visiting people for the gospel...revives our enjoyment of the rich Christ. Many saints have testified that going out to visit people in this way revived them to contact Christ, enjoy Christ, and absorb all the riches out from Him. This is the recovery of the enjoyment of the riches of Christ for bearing fruit. (*The Scriptural Way to Meet and to Serve for the Building Up of the Body of Christ*, Chapter 24)

The Living Contents of the Vital Group Practice

In the group meeting we should have the proper, intimate, and thorough fellowship with one another by exercising our spirit with much and thorough prayer. This is the first section of the vital group meeting, which should occupy about twenty-five minutes. In this section of the meeting, there should be the elements of fellowshiping and interceding, caring, shepherding, and visitation. The second section of the meeting, which should occupy about thirty minutes, is the teaching in mutuality with the mutual asking and answering of questions.

Verses 24 and 25 of Hebrews 10 are the basis for our practice of the group meetings. These verses say, “Let us consider one another so as to incite one another to love and good works, not abandoning our own assembling together, as the custom with some is, but exhorting one another; and so much the more as you see the day drawing near.” These verses first say that we need to consider one another. This implies that we have a genuine care for all the members of our vital group. To care for one another means to consider one another. Today we may not care for others. We do not really care whether or not a certain brother comes to the meeting or whether or not a certain sister is sick. The genuine care for one another needs to be recovered among us.

Through the exercise and release of our spirit, we will spontaneously have some teaching in mutuality. A brother may [have a question about what a certain portion of the Word means]. This might become a subject raised up for your fellowship. We can have this kind of fellowship in many ways.

[Then], we have to start our action for the increase..Before going out, we must have some preparation. First, we must prepare some candidates for us to go to visit. We need to consider all our relatives, neighbors, classmates, colleagues, and friends. Out of these ones whom we know, we need to choose some to labor on for the gospel. Of course, we have to do this by prayer. We should pray, “Lord, who are the best two or three right now for me to work on?” I shared in a previous chapter that we all should make a list of the people we know who need to be saved. When we read this list prayerfully, we will have some kind of inner registration of the two or three whom we should labor on now. We have to consider their situation and labor on them appropriately. (*Fellowship concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups*, Chapters 17 and 24)

Fellowship Questions:

1. How is restoring a sinner through prayer in harmony a picture of living the kingdom life in the church life?
2. For the restoring of the sinning brother, who and what are key for “touching the heavens”? Discuss with your group or companion if you have had this experience.
3. What is the purpose of the vital groups? What does it mean for us as a branch to be “cut off” or “cast out” (John 15:6, note 1)?
4. What are the living contents of a vital groups’ practice? Consider with the members of your group how you feel you all are doing in terms of having these living contents as part of your practice in coming together.