

## **BRINGING IN AN ATMOSPHERE OF LOVE THROUGH PRACTICAL CARE AND SHEPHERDING**

- We need to see that formality in our meetings keeps us from truly knowing the members of our group and from being blended together
- We need to see that fellowship and prayer together in spirit cause us to truly know one another
- We need to see that when we know one another we can consider one another and begin to care for one another practically
- This practical care stirs us up to love and good works, which then becomes a pattern for our new ones

We have pointed out that 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.

### **Having Vital Groups, Not Formal and Religious Groups**

I have stressed in the past that the group meeting should not be a formal, religious worship service. But after attending some of the group meetings, I have observed that we are still somewhat having a religious meeting, a worship meeting, a kind of service. This is because we are too formal. In the group meetings, we should fellowship freely, sing freely, pray freely, and ask and answer questions freely without formality. When we sing a hymn, we do not necessarily have to sing it in order from the first verse to the last verse. We may begin with the last verse or with any verse according to the leading of the Spirit. We should not sing the hymns in a dead way but in a living, exercised way with the release of our spirit.

We need *vital* groups, not formal, religious, and dead groups. We need to pray, “Lord, make us vital in singing, vital in speaking, and vital in everything.” The Psalms tell us that we need to give a ringing shout and

make a joyful noise to the Lord (71:23; 100:1). Our habit of being formal limits us in the meetings of the church. We should be “crazy” in the Spirit, but our craziness should be spontaneous and normal, not a kind of demonstration or performance. In our vital groups we should be living and exercised in our singing and praying.

### **Considering One Another so as To Incite One Another to Love and Good Works**

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.

To consider one another in a practical way is to love one another. We say that we love one another, but in what way do we love? We may not care for anyone in a practical way. Love means practical care and consideration. When we consider one another, we incite one another to love and good works. We stir up one another. If someone cares for me, that spontaneously stirs me up, incites me, to love and good works. *To love* here is not an infinitive. *Love* is a noun, just as *good works* is a noun. We incite one another to love and good works by caring for one another, considering one another.

We need the intimate fellowship with one another with the practical care and shepherding. One sister may point out that another sister in the group is absent because she is having some particular trouble. After sharing with the other group members the nature of the problem, the group can

pray for her and fellowship about how to give her the practical care and help.

This kind of care stirs up our love and our good works. These good works may refer to small things or big things that are related to God's economy. A saint in your group may not think about God's economy. God's economy seems too abstract and unattainable to him. He thinks that we talk much about God's economy but that this has nothing to do with our present need in our daily life. Through our loving care for this brother, he will be incited to consider God's economy. Without such a loving care and consideration of one another, we may be very indifferent toward the things of God's economy concerning Christ and the church. But once a brother is loved in some practical care, that impresses him and incites him to think about the Christian life and about God's economy. When a brother who is Italian cares for another brother who is Chinese, this is a marvelous testimony. This shows that the different races are swallowed up in the new man and testifies of the practical love among the members of the Body of Christ.

The first thing we have to do in the vital group meetings is to have a thorough fellowship together so that we can know the members of our group in an intimate way. The more thorough our fellowship is, the better. Do we know the occupations of the saints in our vital group and where each one works? Do we know the first and last names of every member of our vital group with their proper pronunciation? By considering these questions, we can see that our fellowship has not been thorough. To love one another involves a lot. We need to endeavor to know one another intimately in the Lord. If someone is absent from our vital group meeting, we should immediately ask where he or she is. We say that our group should be blended, but our blending has not been completed, because we do not know each other thoroughly. When you take action together in serving the Lord, you will see that this is very important. Week after week we have been meeting together, yet we still do not really know one another.

We should know each other's situation and condition in an up-to-date way. Then we will realize there is the need of practical care. If we realize

that a sister is sick, we can fellowship about how to render the proper and practical care to her. We can fellowship about who would be burdened to go or about who could and should go. In the larger prayer meetings of the church, we pray in a general way, but the prayer for one another in the groups is specific with a view to the practical care and shepherding. We may pray for a few minutes, and then we can arrange for some person or persons to visit our sister. This is the shepherding. Later, the one who visits should let the group know the situation of this sister. This is what is implied when we say that the group meetings are eighty percent of the church life.

The new ones whom we bring to our group meetings will not merely be taught by us outwardly. They will observe our practice. This is similar to the children in a family learning things by observing the way the family lives and acts. The new ones will follow the pattern that they see and hear in our vital groups. This is why we must learn how to fellowship with one another and how to get ourselves released. (*Fellowship Concerning the Urgent Need of the Vital Groups* Ch. 17)

#### **Fellowship Questions:**

1. What do you think that it means to know one another intimately in the Lord, and why is this required in order of us to care for one another in a practical way?
2. Why does formality limit our ability to have fellowship and prayer concerning the condition and situation of the group members?
3. How can we be "crazy" in the spirit while being spontaneous and normal?