

“Cultivating The Covenant Community”

Part 2

Ephesians 4:1-7, 11-16

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INTRODUCTION

Small groups are **not an add-on, secondary concern, or fad**. What happens in a good small group is part of the very work of the church itself. **It is primary**, and should be seen that way. **They are a valid expression of what the body of Christ is supposed to be doing on the earth**. They are a structured expression of the doctrine of the church. They are as big a part of what the New Testament dictates as preaching and teaching.

But, every member in any group experiences **the common problem of living in a fallen world**. As fallen people, we love and deal with other fallen people. Because Adam and Eve passed on to us ***the art of going our own way, we all encounter fallen spiritual, relational, psychological, emotional, and functional dynamics***. If you/we address and help in growth within these dynamics, you/we will help people, no matter what kind of group you lead or participate in. In other words, we help people reach the goal set by God.

Note our text; Ephesians 4:16

This all began in the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve had a good relationship, were healthy, and loved their work— until something happened. ***They tried to take God’s place***. As a result, ***life as it was created to be lived became unavailable***. In their attempt to become god-like, ***they lost their ability to be fully human***.

What did that mean for Adam and Eve, and what does it mean for us?

- A. Disconnection from the Source of life**. God had provided all they needed for life— materially, relationally, spiritually, and in every other way. When **they** decided to play **His role**, humankind fell into trying to provide for itself independent of God. We went down the path of trying to be **self-made** or self-sufficient.
- B. Dual loss of relationship**. Adam and Eve lost their relationship with God, and they became alienated from each other. Their intimacy with Him and one another **was replaced by fear, hiding, mistrust, and other things** that we know too well.
- C. Shame**. Adam and Eve felt ashamed, judged, and condemned. To cope with guilt, they began to perform and, worse, **to hide who they really were**. They **covered their vulnerability with fig leaves, just as we do, a false-face to look better than we are**.
- D. Disobedience**. Humankind **lost God’s authority in our lives and no longer naturally obeyed him**. We became our own bosses, going our own way, and disobeying His ways, to our loss.
- E. Lost knowledge of God’s ways**. With little knowledge of God’s ways, **we disregard learning what he says**. God designed life to work in very specific ways. He has told us how to relate to one another, set and reach worthwhile goals, and get through difficulties. **But we try to figure it out for ourselves without consulting the designer or His manual**.

F. Lost control. God was originally in control of everything except us. He left us free to control ourselves but intended that we yield the rest of the universe to His control. We were to trust and to yield. When we fell, we reversed course.

We lost control of ourselves (self-control) and began trying to play God and controlling everything else around us, especially other people. So we no longer feel in control of our own lives and try to control everyone and everything around us.

I. Ministry of Reconciliation

This is where our groups come in. Instead of giving empty religious answers to these problems, you/we have another calling. God has not called you to be moral police who set people straight. He has called you/us to help restore life unto Himself in the way it was created to be.

Turn to 2nd Corinthians 5:18-20

The goal is the ministry of reconciliation - You/We are bringing people back to God and the life He created for them to live.

Reconnect to the Source of life and see that God is the source of whatever they are trying to accomplish in life and in the group

Reconnect through real relationship to God and through experiencing connections with others within the group.

Experience total grace, acceptance, and forgiveness in the group— and the absence of shame, guilt, judgment, and condemnation

Learn and experience the value of obedience to God as the authority of life

Learn God's ways and how to apply them to life situations

Give control to God for the rest of life (and relax in doing so) but take control and responsibility for themselves .

Closing – Group At Work

You/We can help people achieve these six universal aspects of reconciliation while you pursue your group's specific goals. In people lives we bring about lasting change as we implement the foundations of the gospel into their everyday experience.

Celebrate this!

Question; "What Reconciliation Looks Like?"

