

Hi all,

I've not written on house church in a couple months - just tired and drained on a lot of different levels. But recharged now and looking forward to the 'travel season'.

Meeting with Purpose

Part of what makes the gathering of the church in a home a 'church', is the purpose behind the meeting. Unlike a prayer meeting, Bible study, or time of worship with friends which may happen whenever it is convenient for all, a house church meets with purpose, on a regular basis, with commitment to one another. As such people move their schedules around to be there because it is important to them.

Though Emperor Constantine decreed Sunday to be the official day of worship in the year 321, Christians were meeting on Resurrection Day long before his command, as seen in Acts 20:7: "And on the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached to them..."

This was in the port city, now in modern Turkey, called Troas. It is the same city where in Acts 16:7-10 Paul saw the vision of the Greek man saying 'Come over here and help us'.

My point isn't the day of the week, for in Romans 14 Paul called believers who said we should worship on one day over another 'weak in the faith'. But Acts is clear early believers had set aside a time they could commit to, to make their schedules revolve around, a set time to meet with other disciples. This was no 'I'll be there if I'm not too tired from work', nor 'I'll try to make it if I get out of the store in time and get my groceries put away'. It held the place in their hearts it should have, an important part of their lives.

They met Acts 20:7 says, 'to break bread together'.

Breaking bread is mentioned 5 times in Acts and means both having a common meal and can mean the Lord's Supper, which Jesus celebrated as part of a meal as you'll recall. In the gospels and Acts, even in I Corinthians 11, it wasn't separate from a main meal with separate paper cups filled with juice and some tiny bread pieces served somewhere in a 'church service'.

The communion of the Lord's Supper was part of the communion of the saints over a meal - just part of the end of the meal as Jesus did in the original. (Those 5 times are Acts: 2:42, 46; 20:7, 11; 27:35)

I celebrate anytime the Lord's Supper is shared and however it is shared. The purpose of partaking in the Lord's Supper reflects the larger fact that the saints gathered with purpose, with intent on a regular basis.

Their commitment to these meetings is clear if you examine Acts 20:6-12.

This is where v 7 says they gathered on the first day of the week to break bread, and Paul preached to them - and that he preached until midnight. That is when Eutychus fell asleep in the window, fell to his death, Paul went down the 3 stories to ground level, raised him from the dead, THEN verse 11 says:

"When he therefore came up again (to the room where he had been preaching before he had to go downstairs to raise Eutychus from the dead) and had broken bread and eaten, and talked a long while, even to the break of day, he departed."

I'm not saying our gathering together should always start in the evening, raise someone from the dead at midnight (also affords a short potty break) and then continue 1 man preaching until the sun rises - but I do want to note that no one complained about how long the meeting was. LOL.

Some practical helps:

Who ever is leading the meeting, lead with purpose. If you start at 10am, then allow the usual 15-30 minutes of valuable visiting, for fellowship is very important. But don't let it go on 45 or 60 minutes. Respect the fact that everyone is there with purpose and intent on being there, so honor them by starting close to when you say it starts.

Start with prayer - this focuses everyone and is a good time to bring needs before the Lord and give thanks for all the good things shared during the time of fellowship.

If you are a leader, or for that matter anyone who notices that someone is butting in and taking the discussion away from where the Lord was moving, or someone is dominating and rambling on and on - don't be afraid to step in and redirect it back to the purpose you had in your heart for the gathering.

This can be done tactfully; "That's a good point, but lets go back to where we started" or "Thanks, but I think the main point the Lord put on my heart is..." can redirect gently and all who are sensitive to where the Spirit was headed, will be thankful.

And remember it isn't numbers that meet, but that the Lord does what He wants in the meeting. This will be multifaceted: There is value in fellowship, in a meal, in the Lord's Supper if you choose to celebrate it that day, in the worship, prayer and teaching - it isn't so much what's taught, but what's caught.

Those are some thoughts...meet with purpose, don't be afraid to lead with purpose, start on time, let the Lord have His way...our gatherings are worthy of being elevated in our priorities in life for as we gather together in His name, so is He in our midst!

Blessings,
John