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Home Church Leaders Course

1. The Home, the Foundation of the New Testament Church

• Introduction

"So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from <u>house</u> to <u>house</u>, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." - Act 2:46

"And daily in the temple, and in every <u>house</u>, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus Christ." - Act 5:42

The western church has long ago forgotten the importance of the home as the vehicle that the Lord chose to establish and build His Church. The home has always been central to the spreading of the gospel and the building up of the church through teaching and discipleship.

It was in an upper room of a <u>home</u> that Jesus taught on and instituted the principles and ordinances of the New Covenant (**John Chapters 13-17**). It was again in an upper room of a <u>home</u> that the 120 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and the Church began in earnest (**Acts 2:1-4**). It was in the <u>home</u> of Cornelius the Roman centurion that the gospel was first preached to the gentiles (**Acts chapter 10**). When Peter had been arrested for preaching the gospel, the believers met in the home of Mary the mother of John to pray for his release (**Acts 12:5-12**).

For the first four hundred years of the Churches existence, believers almost always assembled in private homes. The Bible only records one exception to this norm (Acts 19:9-10).

From the epistles of Paul we learn that the Church grew in the homes of believers. The Bible records these home churches by name as a testament to His purpose;

- "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers,... Likewise greet the church that is in their <u>house</u>." **Romans 16:3-5**
- "The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their <u>house</u>."
 - 1 Corinthians 16:19
- "Greet the brothers who are in Laodicea, and Nymphas, and the church in his <u>house</u>." Colossians 4:15

• Why the Home

Why was the home used by the Lord so extensively when land could be purchased or donated and a meeting hall built that would suit the needs of the church? It is evident from the book of Acts that there was sufficient finance coming into the church for this to be a viable option. The answer to the above is far simpler than most would wish to admit.

- Firstly, the culture of the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean countries were and are still very different from our traditional western culture. In that culture people willingly open up their homes to others and exhibit wonderful hospitality. They are warm and welcoming to strangers. They are willing to go out of their way to make one feel welcome. The saying make yourself at home truly comes from this culture which is warm and hospitable.
 - The home became a place were believers could meet and practically show Christian love and enjoy fellowship, worship, teaching and prayer in community.
- A home is warm and personal unlike a church building where we sit formally in rows without really connecting with other congregants. When did you ever have good fellowship in a church building during or even after a service.
- An upper room or court yard of a house could often accommodate between 50 and 300 individuals, so there was no need for a church building.
- With the above in mind, monies could be better utilized by supporting the poor in the congregation (Acts 4:34-35), meeting the needs of widows and orphans (James 1:27; 1 Timothy 5:16) and supporting pastors, teachers, prophets, evangelists and apostles. (Galatians 6:6; Romans 15:27; 2 Corinthians 11:7-9)
- The early church was being persecuted by both the unbelieving Jews as well as the Romans who had Christians tortured and murdered for their faith. In this atmosphere of persecution it was wise to gather discretely in homes. We the end-time church will have to learn and put into practise, by the Lord's grace, biblical home church.

2. What is the Church and why the home is perfect to express its outworking

What is the Church

"But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and <u>church</u> of the first-born who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, <u>to the spirits of just men made perfect</u>, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel." – **Hebrews 12:22-24**

"So we, being many are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another." – **Romans 12:5**

And He is the Head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." - Colossians 1:18

The Church is made up of every soul who has been born again through God given repentance (**Romans 2:4**) and faith in Jesus (**Romans 5:1-2**) by the Holy Spirit (**John 3:3-8**). Every soul desires to worship the Lord and give Him praise and thanks-giving for their salvation (**Philippians 3:3**) Each soul cannot be independent or exist in isolation to the rest of the Church which is the Body of the Lord Jesus. We are all dependent on each other (**1 Corinthians 12:12-27**) and the Lord requires us to live in community with other believers (**Acts 4:32**) and in so doing we express the character of the Church, the Body of the Lord Jesus.

We the Church have been instructed by the Lord to;

- 1. Abide in Him (**John 15:1-8**)
- 2. Worship the Father and the Son (John 4:23-24; 1 Peter 2:5)
- 3. Preach the Gospel (Mark 16:15)
- 4. Make disciples of all nations through teaching (**Matthew 28:18-20**)
- 5. Love one another as Jesus has loved us (**John 13:34-35**)
- 6. Pray for, exhort and support one another (**Romans 12:9-16**)
- 7. Pray for the Lord's will to be done (**Matthew 6:9-10**)
- 8. Provide for the widows (1 Timothy 5:3-16)
- 9. Care for the orphans and the poor (**James 1:27**)
- 10. Give to the poor (James 2:15-16; Galatians 2:1)
- 11. Feed and tend the sheep of God (John 21:15-17)

The question we need to ask is can we comply with these instructions through our Sunday worship services? Is it possible for a pastor to effectively shepherd the souls in a church without the assistance of the laity? Is the Sunday worship service the correct vehicle to feed the poor, exhort one another, build strong Christian relationships or make disciples?

• Expressing the ministry of the Church through Home Church.

We can conclude that the Sunday Worship Service is inadequate in fulfilling the biblical requirements and institutions of the Church. In contrast to Sunday Service, Home Church is ideal for meeting these institutions and requirements. Let us examine how.

1. Discipleship

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen."
(KJV)

The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) is to make disciples

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and not converts. Many have been converted to Christ through evangelism but very few of that number have become disciples. A disciple is a convert who is under instruction. True discipleship must be interactive. The disciple must be allowed and encouraged to ask questions concerning his faith. He must be discipled in an environment that allows this interaction. The disciples spiritual progress must be assessed from time to time which cannot be done on a Sunday but can be done through questions and answers in a relaxed environment such as a home.

"The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you." - Philippians 4:9

"Imitate me, just as I imitate Christ." – 1 Corinthians 11:1

Discipleship is caught and not taught i.e. Christians need role models who are more mature in the Lord so that they can learn from them how to pray, worship, study, witness and conduct themselves, to name just a few areas. Home Church allows young Christians to draw close to other mature believers and to develop close, meaningful relationships which are unlikely to form in any other environment.

2. Worship

"But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him." – **John 4:23**

"Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; for its pleasant, and praise is beautiful." – Psalm 147:1

Sunday service is made up of believers, enquirers, those doing "their duty" and those forced to be in Church by parents or spouses (unfortunately). But Home Church is for those who want to worship the Lord, be part of His Body and grow in Him. Therefore the Home Church is not restricted in their worship by those not wanting to participate and as a result, the Holy Spirit is able to move freely and in power. Worship becomes unrestricted and free, touching the very heart of the Father. If you decide to spend the time in worship only, no one will be offended, unlike a Sunday service.

3. Preaching the Gospel

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you." –

1 Timothy 4:16

The greatest witnessing tool that we have, is our conduct. (Who you are speaks so loudly that people cannot always hear what you are saying.) When unbelievers observe the consistent conduct of Christians in an informal environment they are more open to hearing the gospel. Through prayer, the ministry of the Holy Spirit and the believers conduct in the Home Church, unbelievers will be moved more readily to receive the gospel.

4. Love one another

"A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." – **John 13:34-35**

 	

Home Church is the ideal environment through which we as believers can fulfil this command. It is impossible for a pastor to spend time with each member of the congregation on a regular basis. As such the pastor often is unaware of what is going on in the lives of each member of the congregation. But through the Home Church, individuals are ministered to and their needs are related back to the pastors. In the Home Church we form loving bonds of fellowship and strong Christian relationships that meet our need to be loved and to belong.

If there are material needs among believers, these can be made known through the Home Church so that the Church, were possible, can help meet those needs (**Acts 4:32-35**). It is the duty of the church to love, encourage and support all those who are born again.

5. Prayer

In the Home Church we can pray more effectively than at Sunday service because we are not hindered by time constraints and other activities. We are free to follow the leading of the Holy Spirit. When there is a need for prayer, it is easy to pray with and for those that you have become close to. Because of its smaller size, there tends to be greater unity in the Home Church and this enables the Lord to move in greater power through our prayers

• What is the difference between Home Church and Cell Church

The fundamental difference between Home Church and a Cell based Church is that a well run Home Church should be able to function effectively, independent of the local church of which it is a part. In a cell church the individual cells are bound to a strict program made up of usually;

- welcome / ice-breaker
- a set time of praise and worship
- a time of discussion on material given them by the main church. This material or the discussion of the Sunday sermon does not encourage the cell leader to share anything outside of the topic at hand
- refreshments
- Administration, paperwork and report-back

Cells are strictly governed and overseen. The cell Church often discourages cell leaders from seeking God for His will for their individual cell. Cell leaders are reduced to facilitators who make sure the Church program is followed and implemented. Very little allowance is made for the Cell leader to grow into a minister and shepherd of the sheep in their care.

On the contrary the Home Church is encouraged to become a fully functioning micro-church. As discussed previously, the Sunday meetings can never fulfil the complete expression of Church and Body ministry. The Home Church Leader is not a facilitator but a shepherd over a small group who must be available for them always not just one night a week. He is to disciple, teach and pray for his flock

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Leaders are taught to wait on the Lord and seek Him for His will for the meetings. Material is only given should it be requested by the Home Church leader. Programs are never encouraged.

The Holy Spirit is encouraged to guide the evening into what ever He wants to do.

Home Church leaders are not given reports and administration to do. They are appointed because they are mature believers who are able to take on the responsibility of looking after other Christians. Only if they feel unable to handle a particular situation will they call for the elders of the church to assist.

In conclusion Cell Church does not build strong leaders who shepherd strong and growing Christians. It is program driven, restricting the Holy Spirit and often insipid merely babysitting believers until the next Sunday service where the Elders can sow into them again.

4. What are the Qualifications of a Home Church Leader

Mature Christian

Romans 12:1-18 (Read)

In his epistle to the Romans, Paul lists the attitudes and the attributes of a mature Christian. It is these attitudes and attributes that anyone desiring any form of spiritual service should display. It is interesting to note that these are not the qualifications for elders but for the laity.

Let us examine some of these attitudes and attributes more closely.

Calling

"But now God has set the members, each one of them in the body, just He pleased. And if they were all one member, where would the body be?" – 1 Corinthians 12:18-19

As with any spiritual service, we do not choose where we want to be used. It is God who places us in the ministry He has called us to. You will be prompted, in your spirit, by the Holy Spirit to become a Home Church Leader. If it sounds like a good idea but there is no leading in your spirit, it is either not the right time or it is not in Gods will for you. Do not be disheartened, there are many other areas of service where the Lord is wanting to use you.

Servanthood

Matthew 20:25-28 (Read)

The word leadership is foreign to the New Testament vocabulary. The Church is made up of servants not leaders. The Church does not require leadership training but rather servanthood training. Anyone who wants to occupy an office of ministry must be a servant. If we are unwilling to serve the least in the Church we are not qualified for Home Church Leadership. Home Church Leaders must be servants. "If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you." - John 13:14-15 (KJV)

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• Be able to teach

"And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men (anthropos), who shall be able to teach others also." - 2 Timothy 2:2

Home Church leaders must be able to teach the Word of God. They must have a sound understanding of the foundational teachings of Christianity and be anointed of God to share these with others. At the same time they must take heed of the warning from **James** 3:1, that teachers will receive a stricter judgement from God. In light of the above they must be mature enough not to teach on those things that they are not sure of.

Anyone who feels called into the full time ministry should first be a Home Church leader for a season of testing and training before he is released.

Hospitable

"Be hospitable to one another without grumbling." -1 Peter 4:9 The single most important attribute that the Home Church leader requires is that of hospitality. Hospitality is not a spiritual gift but an attitude of heart. People must be made to feel welcome in your home and not feel as though they are imposing on you and your family. People thrive in an atmosphere of love and acceptance. The Home Church leader must be able to create that atmosphere in his home.

Shepherd

"...Jesus said to him, "Feed My lambs...Tend My sheep...Feed My sheep..." – John 21:15-18

A Home Church leader must have a shepherds heart. Every Christian is called to love the brethren but we do not all have the heart of the shepherd. The shepherd is willing to go after the backslider, be patient with difficult brethren and be willing to go out of his way to be of service to the Body. The heart of a shepherd is the greatest attribute of a Home Church leader.

Communion

"So, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from <u>house</u> to <u>house</u>, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart." - Act 2:46

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-32

Communion is the most misunderstood institution of the Church. It is a covenant reminder that allows us to examine our standing in Christ on a daily basis whilst worshipfully remembering His wonderful salvation. Instead of it becoming a habit it should be looked forward to regularly as an act of worship.

The early Church took communion on a very regular basis. In fact the bible implies that they observed communion every time they met. I personally believe that we should partake of communion on a regular basis. This is just not possible to do it properly on a Sunday because we have unbelievers with us who are not permitted to partake (1Corinthians 11:27-30). Added to this is that the logistics of having communion in the Home are much simpler than at "Sunday

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Church."

Home Church allows us to have communion on a weekly basis and gives us opportunity to examine ourselves before the Lord as we are instructed to do.

While taking communion, it is a perfect time for folk to share testimonies of what the Lord has done for them, or means to them. Encourage the folk to "proclaim His death ..." and glorify Him through personal testimony.

Running A Home Church

Personal preparation

1. Prayer

The Home Church leader must have already developed a daily disciplined prayer life before he takes on this ministry. Without faith and prayer nothing can be achieved for the Kingdom. His pray life must include fervent and effective prayer for those whom he has been given the responsibility to disciple and care for. Thankfully the Word is full of many examples of how we are to pray for the brethren. Here are a few examples. Galatians 4:19; Ephesians 1:15-23; Ephesians 3:14-21; Philippians 1:9-11; Colossians 1:9-11; Colossians 4:12

2. Bible Study

"Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth." – 2 Timothy 2:15

"All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works." – 2 Timothy 3:16-17

As with prayer, it is important to allow the Word of God to permeate your spirit and soul that you may be equipped to minister both in and out of season. The more you study, the more you can give out; the more you give out the more God will give to you.

3. <u>Preparation</u>

The law of sowing and reaping applies to the ministering of the Word as well as finance. The better your preparation through prayer, study and discipling, the more effective your ministry will be.

Preparing the home

Here are some points on your home that are important to remember in order to make people feel welcome;

- 1. Make sure your street number is clearly visible
- 2. Put on the outside lights and make sure that the room in which you are meeting is well lit.
- 3. Make sure that your intercom or door bell is in working order.
- 4. Have the room prepared with chairs set out before the

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- first people arrive. Have someone at the front door to welcome the brethren.
- 5. Make sure your pets are put away where they will not disturb anyone. Remember some people are allergic to pets hair, others may not like animals so try to be sensitive to their feelings.
- 6. Seat people in a circle for better interaction and not in rows.
- 7. Switch of the TV and if possible have some praise and worship songs playing quietly.
- 8. Open windows and switch on ceiling fans or airconditioners on hot evenings. Provide a heater in winter.
- 9. Put away ornaments and small items if you are expecting young children in order to avoid unpleasant situations arising.
- 10. Lay out refreshments before guests arrive.

Worship

- 1. Prayfully prepare the songs you want to sing before the meeting.
- 2. You can choose to sing along to a CD or you can use a song book. If someone is able to play a guitar or piano you might want to ask them to be responsible for worship.
- 3. Open the meeting in pray before worshipping. Ask a different person to open in prayer each meeting. This will give them confidence to participate in the meeting.
- 4. Allow a minimum of at least 15 minutes for praise and worship.
- 5. Be sensitive to the Holy Spirit, He does meet with us in small groups as well as on Sundays. Follow His leading and you will soon experience the gifts of the Spirit following

Ministry/Discipling

The fundamental difference between Sunday ministry and Home Church ministry is that Home Church is and always must be interactive. The role of the Home Church leader is to disciple those entrusted to him. He therefore must be able to determine where people are spiritually through questions and answers. Likewise, his teaching style must allow people to ask questions if they do not understand what is being taught.

The Home Church leader must allow people to give input into the lesson but at the same time not allow the topic from going off on a tangent. To this end, he must lovingly steer the conversation back in the direction that the Spirit was leading. There will always be those who are unable to recognise the moving of the Spirit and will unknowingly go off on a tangent. Be patient with these brethren, "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples (weaknesses) of the weak, and not please ourselves." (Romans 15:1) Remember that we were all once babes in Christ, these to will mature.

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"Therefore my beloved brethren, let every man (anthropos) be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath." - James 1:19 Paul uses the word anthropos meaning, "mankind" and not aner translated, male. Therefore the scripture speaks to both men and woman. There are those in the Church who are unable or unwilling to obey this scripture and you are bound to have at least one of them in your Home Church or Church. It is important not to allow these individuals to dominate every discussion or conversation as it causes others to withdraw and feel excluded. There is no easy way in dealing with this kind of believer except that it must be done in love. The best way is to take them aside and lovingly explain to them that others would also like to contribute. If they are unable to control themselves, you may have to ask them publicly to allow another to answer a question that you have asked or interrupt them and ask someone else their opinion.

Finally, be observant. Watch peoples reactions to what you are teaching. If they appear puzzled or removed, stop and ask them if they understand what you have just taught. Remember your function is to minister to them, where they are and not to get through an agenda.

If someone is new to the Home Church, make a special effort to make them feel welcome. Introduce them to everyone by name and make sure that people engage them in conversation during tea after the ministry

Outreach

As a Home Church you might want to get involved in outreach activity to Old Age Homes, Orphanages, Hospitals or the poor. I knew of a Home Church that used to go every Saturday to the children's ward at a government hospital to minister to the children through song and the Word. There are many fulfilling ways to spread the message of the Gospel and it is always much easier doing it in a group of people that you are comfortable with.

"... The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few." - (Matthew 9:37)

There are many lonely and hurting people who have been abandoned by family and friends who are existing in Old Age Homes, Prisons, Hospitals and Orphanages. These are our harvest fields. They want someone to care for them and give them a ray of hope. We the Church have that hope, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Go, you will be amazed what God can do through willing vessels for His glory.

Reporting

The Home Church leader is the link between the pastors and the sheep. It is the Home Church leaders responsibility to inform the pastors of the needs of the people in the Home Church so that the Church is able to respond to those needs.

If a situation arises that you as a Home Church leader feel uncomfortable dealing with, bring it to the attention of the pastors so that they can assist you in dealing with the matter. The pastors will spend time discipling the Home Church leaders so it becomes important to develop a strong ministry relationship.

Discipline

"Reject a divisive man after the first and second admonition (warning)" – **Titus 3:10**

"Now I urge you brethren, note those who cause divisions and offences, contrary to the doctrine you learned, and avoid them."

- Romans 16:17

(Read **Matthew 18:15-17**)

The most difficult matter to deal with in the Church is discipline. But it is a fact that Satan will use people to destroy the Church (Galatians 2:4; 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:18-19). In the light of this we as servants of the Lord and His people must not tolerate Satan's working in our midst.

If there is a person who is purposely bringing strife, sin or false teaching into the Home Church this must be dealt with immediately and biblically in love. If allowed to fester it will affect not only the Home Church but the whole Body. If you are experiencing a problem in the Home Church, bring it to the attention of the pastors to help you deal with it. Remember this is not an indictment against you. The apostles Paul and John were also plagued with difficult as well as false brethren.

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