

Why Home Churches?

The phrase “home church” (or simple, or organic, or relational, or missional church) stirs a variety of knee-jerk reactions in people; a frown on the face of most ... but even clear disgust from others, especially church leaders. These reactions stem from the fact that many who have pursued “Home Church” in the past have often done so in negative reaction to the traditional church, leaving unnecessary havoc in their wake. Home church has thus often been associated with a disgruntled, ingrown little group of “us-four-and-no-more;” a group of hurting, finger-pointing people who are destined to eventually hurt one another ... and ultimately give up on “church” altogether.

The landscape is changing fast today¹. All around the world the Spirit is moving and the traditional structure of the church is being shaken. Home churches are springing up everywhere ... yes, some out of the usual negative reactions ... but many, out of a genuine rediscovery of the early church wineskin. These courageous believers purposely *honour the traditional church*, yet press out for the “new thing” on God’s heart of restoration. For their sake, we must provide a sound answer to this question, “Why home churches?” Our aim is to cheer them on as they weather the storms of misunderstanding and, at times, persecution they will face.

Again, we ask the question:

Why Home Churches?

There are at least two key reasons.

(1) *The early church found life and expression in home churches.*

It is amazing that when most believers read the word “church” in the New Testament writings they mentally picture either a building, a Sunday morning service (complete with pastor and sermon) or at the very least, a congregational-based community. However, the early church was very different from this picture. The essence of the early church is captured in Paul’s phrase, one that appears four times in the New Testament: “**church in the house**” (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15 and Philemon 1:2).

The early church experienced God’s love and life as a family of believers; a lifestyle of togetherness rather than a schedule of meetings; a walking with spiritual fathers and mothers rather than a dependence on gift ministry. While these home churches were vitally connected to a network of home churches with a common apostolic vision (1 Corinthians 1:2), enjoyed times of corporate celebration (1 Corinthians 11:18, 20) and received regular apostolic gift input (Acts 20:20) ... we must not miss the Lord’s heart for them.

These Homes Churches were *not* merely Cell Groups or Bible Study Groups – they were not just a novel way of breaking up the congregation into fellowship groups – they were “**church**” ... self-functioning communities experiencing a wonderful sense of the organic liberty and life of the Spirit as fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, lived out the intimate “**one another**” Scriptures in covenant community (for example, Hebrews 3:12, 13; 10:24, 25; Romans 12:10-16).

There is simply no Biblical or historical evidence of a congregational model of church life in the first century. While there is Biblical evidence of schools, or resource centres, such as the “**school of Tyrannus**” (Acts 19:9) and of corporate celebration times, *the meat and potatoes of the early church was home church life*. Corporate celebrations and apostolic input were the cherry-on-the-top for the network of home churches in a city; it was not the main meal!

(2) *The very nature of God demands we find our identity in Him as a spiritual family.*

God has chosen to define Himself (and thus exist) in community (family); therefore all that flows from Him is, in essence, community (family). God said: “**Let US make [mankind] in OUR image...**” (Genesis 1:26-28).

By nature, God is a Father and Son enjoying fellowship in the Spirit; thus “church” ought to be essentially fathers and sons enjoying fellowship in the Spirit. Yes, there is more to it than this. For one, there is our global mandate to disciple the nations ... but in fulfilling all our vital responsibilities as the “**church**” we must start at this crucial defining point. *In all we do, we must reason from who we are ... a family.* Biblically, we are to find our identity essentially in Christ *and* then in the spiritual family of believers that He “**sets**” us into (Matthew 16:13-18; 1 Corinthians 12:12-18; Romans 12:3-8).

To the question:

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...we simply respond...

God’s very nature is one of community, and He birthed the early church into spiritual families of fathers and brothers, mothers and sisters (home churches); if we want to experience the power the early church enjoyed, then we need to embrace the structure the early church had.

Notes:

[†] Speaking of home churches in America, George Barna says, “In a typical week roughly **20 million** adults attend a house church gathering. Over the course of a typical month, that number doubles to about **43 million** adults” (www.barna.org). According to Dr. David Barret and Todd Johnson (editors of World Christian Encyclopaedia), there are over 20,000 home church movements and networks alive and kicking today with a total of **394 million** church members **worldwide**. They predict that by 2025, there will be 581 million people involved in home church networks, 120 million more than all the other Protestant movements put together!