

Discussing How To Restore The Early Church

Returning Intimacy and Power to the Father's Children

*"I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for,
it will be done for you by my Father in heaven.
For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."*
(Matthew 18:19,20)



SECTION 6 - LESSON 48

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES — Extended Spiritual Family:

• *Shepherded by Elders*

6. Constant Vigilance: Keeping the Sheep In and the Wolves Out
7. Gatekeeping: Spiritual Triage
8. Flying Your Flock To Our Father
9. Seek *Rhema*, Establish *Halakhahs*, Ensure They're Followed



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wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them”
(Acts 20:28-30).



Introduction

We can't emphasize enough how important it is for those who are extended spiritual family and for those serving as elders to diligently *seek God's guidance* and adamantly *apply His Word* by establishing *halakhahs*. May your faith community not neglect this as a key facet of your trust walk in Jesus!

Each person in your fellowship family needs to personally apply God's Word and seek His guidance with the desire to ***please Him*** and ***fulfill His purposes***.

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES Extended Spiritual Family: *Shepherded by Elders*

6. Constant Vigilance: Keep the Sheep In and the Wolves Out

“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.

Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage

Every biblical elder is tasked with the critical responsibility to ***be vigilant***. It requires a man who knows his Lord, who is ***sure of the truth*** and ***courageous enough to stand firm*** in the face of ungodly opposition. To carry out this assignment you need a ***shepherd's vigilance*** to guard and protect those the Spirit has put in your care.

Constant watchfulness is the mandate for those who shepherd our Father's flock. Have you ever seen a sheep that has been mauled by wild dogs? We have and it's a gruesome sight. Yet so many in a home fellowship family have also been mauled by demonic wolves who try to shake the very faith of the sheep.

What a tremendous difference there is between the individual who oversees a

faith family for his own interests, and one who is wholeheartedly devoting himself so that his fellowship family may walk uprightly in their devotion to Jesus!

Look at His contrast of the self-sacrificing shepherd and the paid employee who looks out for #1:

I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd lays down His life for the sheep. He who is a hireling, and not a shepherd, who is not the owner of the sheep, beholds the wolf coming, and leaves the sheep, and flees, and the wolf snatches them, and scatters them (John 10:11,12).

Wolves of **deception** and **division** are lurking on every side, and Satan can easily attack unguarded flocks. Just like the evil religious-system shepherds against whom God railed (see Ezekiel 34) is the hireling who is only concerned with self-preservation.

True shepherds are constantly alert for the presence of enemies who might sway the family in Jesus off God's course or subtly persuade them toward heresy. Spiritual warfare is raging around each follower of Jesus and each fellowship family. Individuals may detour away from the path of Jesus if their leaders aren't vigilant to train them to discern righteousness from wickedness.

There are so many counterfeit, man-pleasing teachings floating around Christendom. Through TV, CD's, the Internet and conferences people receive an array of input that can lead them astray. This is why it's crucial that those who are wise elders make the truth clear and urge that each home learn to *apply* the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, through personal *halakhahs*.

The Bible—

one interpretation, many applications.

As an elder you need to help and encourage each family to establish personal *halakhahs* to provide a wall of protection for their own home. Each *halakhah* they establish for their family from prayerful application of the Word becomes a stone in the wall of protection around their home.



"I do not want you to be participants with demons" (1 Corinthians 10:20).

One aspect of elder watchfulness is oversight of those who are infants in the faith and unaware of either the spiritual battle or the nature of the enemy that is against them. It's vital that each brother and sister in the extended spiritual family take personal responsibility before our Lord in this warfare. This means *identifying and renouncing* any spiritual strongholds that might hinder discernment or personal obedient trust in their walk with Jesus.

Jesus and His disciples never hesitated to cast out demons that would hinder the work of the Holy Spirit in people's lives. Neither was Paul reluctant to expel unclean spirits that interfered with his work, nor to warn the followers of Jesus to be alert against the work and workers of the evil one.

We discussed spiritual strongholds in Lesson 31. Again, we've found that the majority of the people within each faith community are influenced by the same demonic spirits. In one fellowship it might be bitterness, in another, pride, and still another, fear and insecurity. It

appears that the demonic strongholds bring the faith community together because the people feel accepted and comfortable in their shared bondage! These are sometimes called “familiar spirits”.

In our home fellowship family we help people demolish their strongholds *before* they come into our extended spiritual family. This prevents a lot of problems later on.

Several years ago we received a call from a congregational leader in Brooklyn, New York. “My fellowship is growing through 2,000 people because of your book *Demolishing Strongholds*. I want to order your book, *Pastoring by Elders*, to help us disciple all these new sheep He’s sending us!”

When we asked the reason for all these new people, he told us that as each person was becoming free of demonic influence they were turning right around and helping their family members and friends find freedom in Jesus as well!

A day later an evangelist from Texas called: “I wanted to let you know about the number of faith communities I’ve been able to start because of your book *Demolishing Strongholds*.” He told us he advertised the purpose of this book: to help pull down the spiritual strongholds that keep people from walking in power and intimacy with our Lord and with one another. He held meetings for whoever would show up. As they saw the power of Jesus to free them, they put their trust in Him, and went and told others. Then families of Jesus followers formed!

A note of warning:

In your zeal to walk in spiritual freedom and to help others do the same, don’t seek to become an expert in demonology. Satan may seduce you to

become so fascinated with spiritual warfare that you lose your focus on intimacy with Jesus and with God’s goal of a victorious spiritual life that produces much fruit.

Deal with the enemy wherever he gets in the way of what Jesus promises, but *don’t concentrate on him. Keep your focus on Jesus.*

[If this is unfamiliar ground for you, please refer to our workbook and video series, *Demolishing Strongholds*, and our video series, *Certain of What We Do Not See*, for insights on spiritual warfare. Both are a free download.]

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change” (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

People can usually sense tension even if they don’t recognize the cause of it. The enemy of our souls is constantly on the prowl, seeking to devour people’s love for one another and turn them against each other. When detrimental behavior or attitudes aren’t confronted, they can fester into a ground swell of disillusionment about the fellowship family as a whole and the leadership in particular.

Caring shepherds need to face discord head-on in prayer and biblical confrontation. Confrontation may seem negative or unloving to you. In reality, however, biblical confrontation addresses a person in error in a way that is likely to bring about repentance and reconciliation.

Reconciliation with those who repent is a priority in our Lord’s heart. As Jesus directed, **“If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him”** (Luke 17:3).

Both people and sheep find comfort and protection in knowing their boundaries. Assurance that their sheepfold is not a playground for wolves to sow discord or false doctrine brings security to the flock. But if the wolves aren't confronted, distrust of the elders mounts because the sheep sense they're unprotected.

Loss of trust was painfully brought home to us a few years ago at the retreat center. One summer we planned a vacation. A single woman who had been at the retreat center many times offered to tend our sheep while we were gone. Because of her work schedule we ended up leaving on our trip a few hours before she arrived. On our return she left several hours before we got back, so we had no overlap with her at all.

After arriving back at the center we went out to the pasture to check the flock. They ran away from us in a panic! Over the next few days they continued to avoid us. Their distrust greatly concerned us.

Four days after our return, our neighbor stopped by. When we told her about the flock's fear of us, she asked, "Didn't you know that the person who was staying here let her dog loose every day to chase the sheep?" No, we didn't!

We felt ashamed that we'd failed our sheep. Now we understood how much they had trusted us to protect them, and we'd let them down. Many difficult weeks passed before we could regain their confidence. How vividly this experience illustrated to us the sober vigilance that shepherds need!

Another testimony depicts the fruit of biblical confrontation, and warms our hearts to see how graciously the Spirit works to change lives:

For a number of years at the retreat center a singles group from another state came two or three times a year. Although the aver-

age age of the group was late 20s, they were led by two young men, ages 21 and 20. Their loving devotion for God and for their brothers and sisters was evident in both these young guys. Also in the group was Bill, in his mid-30s, who was mainly interested in scoping out the women for dates.

During one of the summer retreats Mike privately asked Bill to walk with him in the pasture, which was downhill from the lodge. Rebuking him in a *very fatherly manner*, Mike said, "Bill, what you're doing in this group is *wrong*. As one of the older men, you're setting a bad example for the younger guys. Your actions are hindering what those two young leaders are trying to accomplish. I don't want to see you back here again unless you're leading this group—and leading them in the path of Jesus!"

Several months later the group returned, with Bill leading them. Several of the singles took Mike aside and told him how, after the last retreat, Bill had asked if he could lead. He'd been changed, and was no longer obsessed with women. Later, when Bill suggested another retreat at our center, some of the people spoke up. "Bill, why would you want to go back there? We heard how tough Mike was on you!"

The singles told Mike Bill's response: "No one has ever loved me like Mike did. It *took love* to tell me what I needed to hear."

How are you at confronting others? Do you readily confront when necessary? Describe what you would do if you knew someone in your fellowship family was holding onto sin.

Ask those in your fellowship to evaluate you.

[Please see our book *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*.]

7. Gatekeeping: Spiritual Triage

“Therefore Jesus said again, ‘I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep... whoever enters through Me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture’” (John 10:7,9).



Shepherds need to be gatekeepers. *Watching the gate* means you don't have an "open door" policy for anyone who decides to drop in, especially when your faith family gathers for fellowship. These are *family* gatherings of those who uphold communal righteousness together.

As you encounter those who are hungering for a fellowship family, meet with them privately as often as you need to. In this way you can discern if they have indeed embraced the true Gospel, are free of strongholds, and if they're eager to uphold practical righteousness in their devotion to Jesus.

If they have yet to encounter Jesus, or haven't tasted freedom from demonic strongholds, continue to meet with them **privately**. It would be grievous for you to forsake answered prayers and testimonies to our Father's glory because you didn't guard the gate of your fellowship!

Then, if and when they respond to His Spirit and walk in covenant with our

Lord, they'll have a ready-made family in place with you and the rest of your extended spiritual family!

The primary responsibility of biblical elders is to point their fellowship family to ever-increasing love and trust in Jesus, and to show that love as they uphold righteousness in their own lives and within their collective fellowship family.

While at the retreat center a local 4-H teen offered us his ewe. She was a good-looking sheep and we gratefully added her to our flock. Not too long after, we noticed she was limping. Close inspection revealed the shepherd's bane: **foot rot**.

A highly contagious infection, foot rot destroys the hoof tissue, crippling the sheep and hindering her ability to graze. To our dismay, the entire flock had been infected. How many hours were spent dipping hooves into copper sulfate and cutting away rotted tissue! The lesson we learned has spiritual implications: No matter how wonderful a sheep looks on the outside, if unrepentance or strongholds are present, you can be sure your flock will be contaminated by it.

Satan knows this. What do you think he will do? He'll send to your fellowship family those he has taken captive to do his will through their unrepentance and the footholds he has in them (see 2 Timothy 2:26; Ephesians 4:27). Why? To hinder your prayers from being answered if you tolerate or excuse sin. Insidiously, your spiritual enemy hopes to destroy the fruitful love you share and sow weeds of discord and lukewarmness.

Never lose sight that only those who are truly following Jesus are indwelled by the Holy Spirit. Don't be reluctant to fully question and discern if someone who wants to be part of your load-bearing family has embraced our Father's

Covenant. As we mentioned in Lesson 24: **Never Assume That Someone Is A Christian!**

When people who call themselves “Christian” first encounter each other, they often assume that the other person is a “Christian” because he or she *claims* to be. Of all the areas in which you need discernment, this is THE area in which you should assume nothing! Eternal consequences rest on it.

Elders need to heed this counsel so they can guide to Jesus those who have yet to encounter Him and repent, and to make sure the unrepentant don’t enter in to undermine your purpose in Jesus as a fellowship family.

If you are serving others as an elder, remind yourself that you are representing a *loving* and *holy* Father in the lives of His children.

You are pointing the way through word as well as personal lifestyle for others to walk in ever-increasing obedient trust. Serving as an elder entails the responsibility to *include* and *exclude*; to *commend* and *correct*. The apostle Paul realized the danger within a faith community if sin was tolerated, and exhorted the called-out ones in Corinth to “*put away from you the evil person*” (1 Corinthians 5:13).

In directing them to exclude a person until he repents (which we see the offender did in the next correspondence to the Corinthian followers of Jesus), Paul is apperceiving God’s command repeated many times in Deuteronomy (13:5; 17:7,12; 19:19; 21:21 and others). This is a function of gatekeeping within the flock.

If you *fear* hurting the feelings of people in the course of serving our

Father, you won’t represent Him in His awesome holiness.

There’s a major difference between being *concerned with the feelings of others*, and the *fear of hurting them*. One flows from a loving heart, the other from control by fear.

You can never fulfill your loving responsibilities to our Father if you’re controlled by fear. The overriding presence of fear indicates that you don’t love as Jesus would:

There is no fear in love. On the contrary, love that has achieved its goal gets rid of fear, because fear has to do with punishment; the person who keeps fearing has not been brought to maturity in regard to love (1 John 4:18, CJB).

Whenever you find you’re shrinking away from that which our Lord has called you to do, you’re not accomplishing His goal for you as a mature gatekeeper on behalf of the people He’s entrusted to your care. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you love more, and to *act* on that love.

Don’t be anxious over what others think or how they react over your loving obedience to your Lord: “*Fear of man will prove to be a snare*” (Proverbs 29:25).

If someone within your fellowship family is continuing to violate God’s Word and you’ve confronted him privately, and with two or three others, then you need to take the next loving step.

Ask yourself: Will you be more concerned about the person who is serving his sin nature, or about the holiness of God and the collective righteousness of the fellowship family? Make sure you know *Whom* you serve if you’re an elder, and the nature of that service on His behalf.

During our first lambing season at the retreat center, one of our ewes refused to nurse her newborn. No matter what we did to encourage her, she wanted nothing to do with that lamb. We thought she was an uncaring mother, and that we'd need to get rid of her.

We bottle-fed the lamb, but before many days transpired it seemed to react with ever-increasing distress. Finally the Holy Spirit made known to Mike a painful directive: "If you want to know what love is, shoot the lamb."

Mike recognized the voice of the Spirit and knew he needed to obey. With tear-filled eyes he loaded the gun and shot the lamb.

We took its remains to the nearby university agricultural department for an autopsy. They reported that the lamb had suffered from "white muscle disease", an ailment that causes paralysis and ultimately death by starvation. Somehow that ewe had known her lamb would die.

We learned something about *tough love* that morning in the barn. Doing the loving thing can hurt. And, hurting because you DO love reflects the love of our Lord Jesus.

Sometimes people choose to be left behind because the cost to follow Jesus is more than they're willing to pay. Neither Jesus nor Paul accepted everyone who professed only an interest. Jesus's command to the wealthy ruler (Matthew 19) pinpointed the very idol that he loved more than he did Jesus.

Paul left behind John Mark for a season because the young man lacked the courage and staying power to complete their mission (see Acts 15). Others who rejected both their trust and the conviction of their conscience were "*delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme*" (1 Timothy 1:20).

Any shepherd of God's people who wants to uphold biblical freedoms and

boundaries must have the spiritual courage to confront when necessary so that the individual might repent and be restored. In this Atomistic culture, rebuking and confronting in prayerful obedience and love may be all you can do to help the unrepentant turn from the broad path that leads to death.

No matter how disobedient your own life was prior to responding to the Spirit's call to repent and love Jesus as your reconciling Lord, as an elder your spirit will yearn to *internalize* God's boundaries and uphold them. Because you've learned the beauty of how confrontation helped *you* to change and become more responsive to His ways, you can more easily appreciate Paul's exhortation:

Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who confront you to enable you to change (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

In order to uphold God's holiness, a spiritual leader must exercise *spiritual triage* [TREE-ahzh]. Triage is a medical term which sorts people into one of three categories:

- those who will live even if they receive no care;
- those who are terminal;
- and those who will live *if* they receive prompt, appropriate intervention.

When Sue and I arrived at the retreat center in 1983, we were asked to "triage" those who came for assistance. Our predecessor had destroyed his ministry at the center because he wouldn't confront people who refused to turn from their sin. Over time things kept getting worse for him, until a guest's suicide brought his ministry to an end.

We needed to triage those who came so that we could identify individuals who wanted to press on in Jesus and those who just wanted sympathy in their sin and its consequences. How graciously the Holy Spirit gave us discernment so that we could recognize the potentially fruitful and help them in their trust walk.

The explanation below describes the category criteria of discernment in spiritual triage. Again, you need Holy Spirit guidance about an individual and his situation, as well as the confirmation of two or three if the person acknowledges sin *but* refuses to repent. When we dealt with people in Levels 2 or 3 below, often the Spirit would give to each person on our staff the same discernment of both their condition and their need.

Level 1 Spiritually Healthy

Repentant people who are healthy in their spirit will go on following Jesus in loving, obedient trust with or without your help. They are fruitfully functioning as they serve His purposes.

Level 2 Spiritually Wounded

Individuals who are suffering emotionally need prompt biblical direction toward Jesus from someone who genuinely cares for them. If wise counsel is ***given, received*** and ***acted on***, their probability of becoming Spiritually Healthy increases.

We further subdivided this group using a scale of 0 to 90. Those with numbers nearer “0” aren’t seriously wounded, but will respond with *encouragement* and *direction* as you point them toward obedient trust in the Lord Who loves them. Those nearer “90” are severely wounded, and very close to being Spiritually Dead.

We found that the higher the number at this level, the more these people

have walked in unrepentance away from the path of Jesus. They normally need to be rebuked to stop their downward progression. The rebuke can act like “paddles” on a cardiac patient.

It’s important that those who ***accept a rebuke*** are given ***specific biblical direction*** and have ***ongoing personal accountability*** if they’re to grow in spiritual health and rediscover what a walk in their Lord looks like. Call it “intensive care” for a period of time. Remember, they’re near spiritual death, and need to turn away from their sin and receive the loving forgiveness that only Jesus can bring (1 John 5:16,17)!

Level 3 Spiritually Dead

Those who are spiritually dead may have a veneer of religiosity but enjoy their sin too much to turn from it. They may like being around others for social reasons or for the attention they crave, but they have NO desire to live righteously.

They’ve chosen to live unrepentantly for so long that Satan has a foothold in their lives. The Adversary will try to slip the unrepentant into your fellowship family for two purposes:

- to wear down healthy followers of Jesus as they devote more and more attention to them;
- or to entice others into spiritual despair or sin in their struggle to press on in Jesus.

If you fail to discern the true spiritual nature of people, Satan will send you all the Level 3, Spiritually Dead people he can. Most will *appear needy*. (We’ve found that a substantial number of these will be divorced.) Yet, behind their seem-

ing need many hide a sin of bitterness. The stories of their hapless lives portray themselves as blameless victims, totally innocent.

Those who are plagued by bitterness may appear to be needy, but in time they'll defile others in your faith community: "*See to it that no one **misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many***" (Hebrews 12:15). Defiled relationships and unanswered prayer are the poisonous fruit of a bitter person continuing in your fellowship family.

The "*grace of God*" to which the apostle refers is sufficient for a believer to choose to forgive. *Missing* that grace evidences a lack of appreciation for the preciousness of Jesus' shed blood. Those bitter tentacles can reach into the lives of others in the faith community to cause grievous trouble in the whole flock.

From our book ***Demolishing Strongholds*** (a free download) are some symptoms that may help you identify a bitter person so you can help them to renounce these spirits and walk in freedom:

- Resentment • Racism • Unforgiveness
- Anger/Hatred • Begrudging • Violence
- Revenge • Chronic Grumbling • Presumption

Don't let a bitter person into your fellowship family! It's worse than inviting a fox into a hen house.

Those with a bitter root cause trouble and defile many.

A bitter person within your fellowship family will stir others to take up an offense against the person who supposedly caused the bitterness. And, your prayers will be hindered as you tolerate that kind of sin in your midst.

Keep the gate closed to those who choose to wallow in sin but want people to excuse them! Come alongside any in your fellowship family who become bitter so that they can respond to Jesus' call, turn from it and be reconciled and restored.

Within our home fellowship family was a single woman who lived at home with her parents. She'd become bitter toward her father over his treatment of her mother. Sue tried to help the younger woman, but she refused to listen. Then Sue and one of the older women in our fellowship family met privately with her. She still refused to forgive her father, or ask forgiveness from him for how her resentment was causing discord within their home.

Sue and the other woman discussed with Mike and another elder in our fellowship family this gal's resistance to turn from her bitterness. Discussing with the rest of the fellowship family the steps that the ladies had taken, the elders then asked the younger woman to not return until she'd repented and could be restored.

You need to realize that Satan's most common weapon of war is bitterness.

People become bitter when they refuse to forgive. Remember, forgiving others is one of the five stipulations for both embracing and remaining in Covenant with our Father.

Our Lord calls each of us to *forgive* in order to be forgiven by Him and remain in fellowship with Him:

For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.

But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins (Matthew 6:14,15).

How can you recognize bitter people? They're so *self*-focused that they have little room for the needs and interests of others. Because of past experiences, they resent any form of criticism, even if it's meant to be helpful. Not having tasted restoration with the ones they blame or haven't forgiven, bitter individuals agitate others who are in conflict rather than encouraging them to seek forgiveness and reconciliation themselves.

Responsible elders are wary of such people and are willing to ask questions—to “look a gift horse in the mouth” no matter how biblically learned or charismatically endowed they may seem. Paul's warning to Timothy is appropriate for all who serve as God's shepherds: **“Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure”** (1 Timothy 5:22). A little leaven of bitterness can defile the whole flock.

Paul also warns the followers of Jesus in Corinth (and us as well!) about Satan's manipulative weapon of unforgiveness:

If you forgive anyone, I also forgive him. And what I have forgiven—if there was anything to forgive—I have forgiven in the sight of Christ for your sake, in order that Satan might not outwit us. For we are not unaware of his schemes (2 Corinthians 2:10,11).

Do you see? Bitterness operates like witchcraft to control, manipulate, or exercise power over others. The bitter person uses slander and gossip about those who hurt him to lure you to sin by listening. As soon as you take an emotional burden against the alleged pain perpetrator, you've fallen under the control of the bitter person.

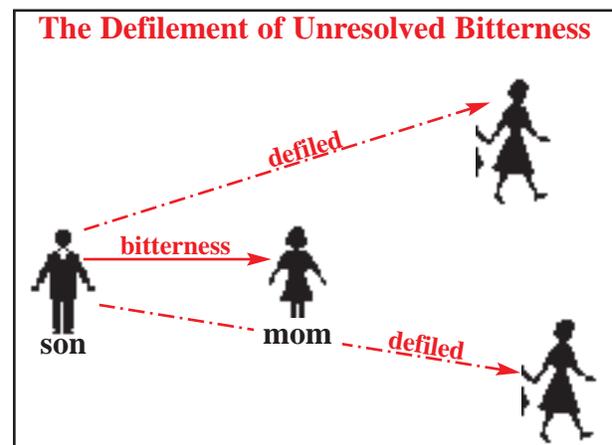
The anecdote below reveals a star-

ling reality of unproductive effort and harmful witness:

The leaders of a certain missionary organization were very concerned because 50% of their missionaries were dropping out even before their first term of service was over. As the leaders investigated the causes, they discovered that 80% of those who had left the field were plagued by unresolved past bitterness with parents and siblings. The dropouts couldn't get along with colleagues who reminded them in any way of the family members they detested.

People project their past unresolved family conflicts onto others with whom they presently have close contact. The same projection occurs when a person who didn't get along with his or her parents marries:

- The way a woman responds to her father's authority tends to be the way she'll respond to the authority of her husband. If she has unresolved bitterness with her father or even her siblings, she'll tend to react negatively toward others later in life, whether her husband, her fellowship family or her co-workers.
- The way a man treated his mother tends to be the way he'll treat his wife.



When she tries tactfully to correct him, he'll likely respond, "You're just like my mother!" He may even project the same resentment onto other women that he meets later in his life, whether in his workplace or in a fellowship family.

Mike had a very healthy relationship with his Dad. Once when he was counseling church leaders, a man stated, "I like to watch the reaction of clergy to you. If they have a good relationship with their fathers, they get along with you. But if there's unresolved bitterness toward their dad, they speak against you. That response is how I recognize which ones I want to befriend and which ones to be careful of."

Mike was surprised by this observation, but because of his closeness with his own father, he knew the man's comments were valid.

Whenever I [Mike] have encountered a young man who has unresolved bitterness with his father, I've NEVER been able to help him unless:

- he goes back to ask forgiveness from his father for his unloving attitudes,
- he also seeks ways to bless his Dad.

Until a person follows this counsel, he'll REMAIN a hardened, mocking or God-denying fool. If you're an elder, send the bitter person back or go with him yourself to the person he's bitter against. Until there is forgiveness given and requested, don't allow the bitter into your fellowship family. That bitterness will defile others!

Mike: My dear older mentor, Frank Murray, came to me shortly after I'd been

wrongfully fired. He told me, "You have to see this situation as the *hand of God* or else you'll become embittered." As we knelt together he read this poem to my face.

STEP BY STEP

"As thou goest, step by step I will open the way before thee"

(Proverbs 4:12, New Translation).

Child of My love, fear not the unknown morrow,
Dread not the new demand life makes of thee;
Thy ignorance doth hold no cause for sorrow,
Since what thou knowest not is known to Me.

Thou canst not see today the hidden meaning
Of My Command, but thou the light shalt gain;
Walk on in faith, upon My promise leaning,
And as thou goest, all shall be made plain.

One step thou seest — then go forward boldly,
One step is far enough for faith to see;
Take that, and thy next duty shall be told thee,
For step by step thy Lord is leading thee.

Stand not in fear, thine adversaries counting,
Dare every peril, save to disobey;
Thou shalt march on, all obstacles surmounting,
For I, the Strong, will open up the way.

Wherefore go gladly to the task assigned thee,
Having My promise, needing nothing more
Than just to know, where'er the future find thee,
In all thy journeying I go before.

Frank J. Exley

Reminding myself that God is sovereign and in control kept me from becoming bitter. Instead I found ways to bless those who had treated me unjustly.

A bitter person has no grasp of God's sovereign reign, and considers Him untrustworthy. Learn from this humorous and powerful story how life-saving it is to trust wholly in His ways!

A king in Africa had a close friend that he grew up with. The friend had a habit of looking at every situation that ever occurred in his



life (positive or negative) and remarking, *'This is good!'*

One day the king and his friend were out on a hunting expedition. The friend would load and prepare the guns for the king. The friend had apparently done something wrong in preparing one of the guns, for after taking the gun from his friend, the king fired it and his thumb was blown off. Examining the situation the friend remarked as usual, *'This is good!'* to which the king replied, *'No, this is NOT good!'* and proceeded to send his friend to jail.

About a year later, the king was hunting in an area that he should have known to stay clear of. Cannibals captured him and took him to their village. They tied his hands, stacked some wood, set up a stake and bound him to it. As they came near to set fire to the wood, they noticed that the king was missing a thumb. Being superstitious, they never ate anyone who was less than whole. So untying the king, they sent him on his way.

As he returned home, he was reminded of the event that had taken his thumb and felt remorse for his treatment of his friend. He went immediately to the jail to speak with his friend. *'You were right,'* he said. *'It was good that my thumb was blown off.'* And he proceeded to tell his friend all that had just happened. *'And so I am very sorry for sending you to jail for so long. It was bad for me to do this.'*

'No,' his friend replied, *'this is good!'*

'What do you mean, "this is good!"? How could it be good that I sent my friend to jail for a year?'

'If I had NOT been in jail, I'd have been with you!'

A consideration for you:

We've returned to the topic of bitterness several times in these lessons. If you are going to remain communally righteous in

our Lord, unforgiveness is the hindrance you'll confront most often. Make sure each "temple" is cleaned and kept clean within the extended spiritual family!

When you're meeting with someone who wants to be part of your fellowship family, don't be reluctant to ask about any unresolved bitterness. Really probe!

Paul recognized the damaging influence the spiritually dead can have on followers of Jesus who want to *live righteously* and *experience answered prayer* in their faith community.

Read this passage aloud with the sorrowful passion with which Paul wrote it:

And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? ...hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord (1 Corinthians 5:2,5).

Any good shepherd must know which sheep to eliminate from the flock and when. When we first began raising sheep, we were given sixteen ewes. Two of the older ones would prowl the fence line looking for weaknesses so they could break out. They'd push against the wire mesh until that part of the fence fell down. Then the whole flock would exit the pasture with these two to graze on the other side.

We tried all sorts of ways to deter the two stubborn ewes from their destructive habit, but nothing worked. Finally a wise farmer counseled us to *cull* these two from the flock. They were, in effect, training the others to be rebellious and fostering habits that were detrimental to the safety of the rest. We took the two to the slaughter house.

As we gained wisdom through the helpful advice of other knowledgeable shep-

herds, we realized how important culling was for the health and overall purposes of the flock. In order for the sheep to pay for themselves we needed each ewe to produce two lambs a year. If, after several tries, we didn't get twins, we'd sell the ewe.

We also looked for lambs that weren't afraid of people since we had so many guests at the retreat center who enjoyed visiting the flock. Unlike goats, sheep aren't normally "people friendly." We kept the lambs that showed a predisposition toward people, and the others we sold.

You may think our methods were severe or unkind. But consider John the Baptist's warning to the self-reliant Pharisees who depended on their Abrahamic lineage and priestly position rather than the humility of turning from sin and living for God's purposes: "**Produce fruit in keeping with repentance**" (Matthew 3:8).

A wise sage once said, "**Bearing fruit is the ONLY sign of life.**" Jesus looked for fruit as a parameter to identify who really belonged to Him. False prophets would bear bad fruit, and like a bad tree, be cut down and thrown into the fire (see Matthew 7:15-20). He commanded His disciples to "**go and bear fruit—fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in My name**" (John 15:16). Fruit-bearing and answered prayer go hand in hand!

Look through the Newer Testament and see how many examples you can find of *whom* and *how* God culls. Not everyone who cries "*Lord, Lord,*" will be welcomed by Him. What is God's criterion? "*He who does the will of My Father Who is in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21).

A recent popular translation of the Bible falsely states that if you go to a sinner as called for in Matthew 18:15-17 and he refuses to repent, you have to follow the steps all over again instead of removing him from fellowship. Describe the steps you would take in dealing with an unrepentant person.

Ensure that your fellowship family has discussed and established a biblical method for dealing with an unrepentant person.

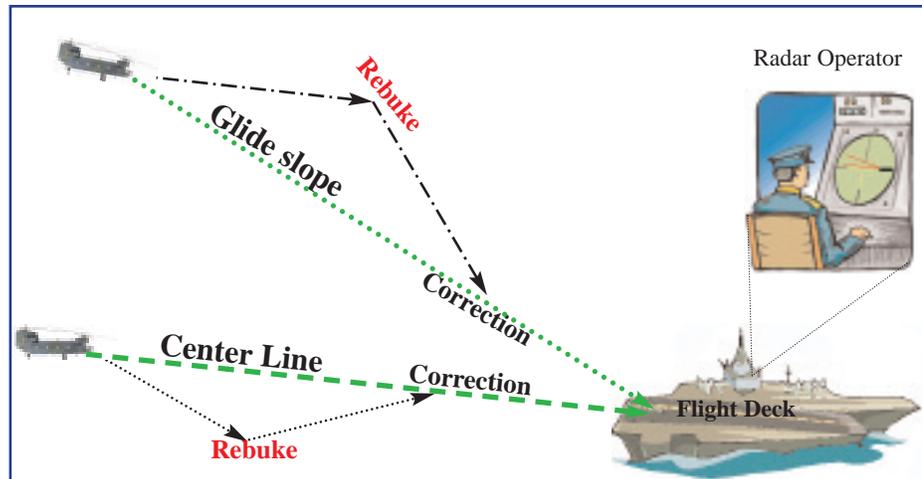
8. Flying Your Flock To Our Father

As Mike quickly discovered during his ten years as a Navy helicopter pilot, the only safe place to land at sea is on a ship with a flight deck. Weather conditions for flying aren't always ideal. In fact, they're quite often marginal due to fog or storms.

When Mike approached a ship under marginal conditions (see diagram next page), he had to rely on the ship's radar to guide him in for a landing. A radar operator aboard the ship radioed directions to the helicopter, guiding it to the ship's flight deck using a Ground Controlled Approach (GCA).

On the operator's radar screen were two lines which converged at the flight deck. One line represented the **glide slope** that the helicopter would need for a safe descent to the flight deck. The other line showed the **center line** and indicated whether the helicopter was left or right of a line that led directly to the flight deck.

As the “blip” of the helicopter approached the lines on his radar, the operator would radio the pilot, “Intercepting glide slope, begin descent.” The pilot would then reduce power and attempt to fly down the glide slope and along the center line.



If the radar return confirmed that the pilot was on both lines, the operator would continue to report, “On course, on glide slope.” If everything went perfectly, those were the words the pilot would hear until he landed on the flight deck.

But conditions normally are *not* perfect. Crosswinds and other factors often force the pilot to make corrections during his descent. For example, if the blip dropped below the glide slope during the approach, the radar operator would radio the pilot, “Below glide-slope.” The pilot would add some power to intercept the glide slope, and the operator would report, “On glide slope.”

When he heard those words, the pilot would reduce his power again. Since his previous power setting had caused the helicopter to go below glide slope, experience taught him to keep a little more power than before but not enough to cause the helicopter to start going above the glide slope. Hang onto these thoughts—we’re going to use them with this passage:

“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work”

(2 Timothy 3:16,17).

The Hellenist, or Greek, world view perceived life as a series of victories or failures depending on how it turned out for you. Our Hebraic forefathers, however, viewed life as a pilgrimage requiring *ongoing instruction* as you continued on to new arenas, and *rebukes and corrections* when you ventured beyond the boundary of God’s Word. It is with this understanding that Paul penned the cited verses to Timothy.

Let’s parallel this passage of Scripture with the same process you need to land aboard a ship that has GCA requirements.

The *flight deck* represents our goal to ***live in union with our Father***. The center line represents ***God’s guidance (rhema) and biblical applications (halakhahs)*** that guide us on our pilgrimage to salvation.

The *glide slope* represents our ***attitudes and view of ourselves***. Un-Christlike attitudes such as pride and rebellion cause us to go *above* the glide slope. And, unholy feelings of insecurity and rejection send us *below*.

Paul understood how important our perception of ourselves is. Rather than evaluating ourselves according to the world’s way of thinking, he urges us to deliberately garment ourselves with good:

• “Do not think of yourself **more highly than you ought**, but rather think of yourself with **sober judgment**, in accordance with the **measure of faith** God has given you” (Romans 12:3).

• “Therefore, as **God’s chosen people**, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience**” (Colossians 3:12).

The man who serves as a **shepherd of a home fellowship family** is like a radar controller. Through life experiences he has come to know our Father and to gain wisdom in his love relationship with Jesus. He’s also learned what the people he’s mentoring must do to know and to serve Him in loving obedient trust. Like the radar controller who brings the helicopter and flight deck together, an elder helps those in his care to experience **relational union with our Father**.

“**Teaching**” is represented by the glide slope and center line. The Scriptures and their applications in our lives, in conjunction with a Christlike attitude lead us to the our spiritual goal—salvation.

“**Rebuking**” is required when someone in the fellowship family is off either slope or center line through sin and unrepentance. A rebuke is needed to keep them from going further astray and endangering their spiritual life.

An elder, like the radar controller, can recognize the younger person’s error clearly. The rebuke may be mild or severe. But it must be the elder’s best attempt to stop the detrimental direction the person has taken.

Being rebuked is not generally a pleasant experience, because someone is stopping us from following the motive

our sin nature. Yet, we are encouraged, “**rebuke a wise man and he will love you**” (Proverbs 9:8b). A person who delights in wisdom will change his behavior or attitude in accordance with the rebuke.

A rebuke doesn’t put the person back on spiritual glide slope or center line. It’s only a warning to stop a sinful path. Like the **remedial action** the pilot must take when the radar controller tells him he’s off center line or glide slope, the rebuked person must change to stop his sinful direction.

If the rebuke is received, he heads back toward the center line. Just as a pilot himself must take the necessary steps of adding or reducing power once he’s back on the glide slope and center line, the individual who was rebuked must change his behavior or attitude to remain on the glide slope. “**Correcting**” reflects the crucial words of affirmation from the elder when the person is back on glide slope and center line.

Without correction, the one being disciplined will meander all over the place and miss the spiritual center line/glide slope completely. Too many frustrated souls who don’t receive correction give up. A person who is properly instructed needs to know when he’s back “on glide slope”.

Again, correction may be viewed as affirmation that he’s back to where he needs to be—on line. And repeated affirmation is needed to let those who are on center line and glide slope know that fact. The encouraging words of the elders act just like the radar operator’s assurance to the pilot, “On course, on glide slope.”

“**Training in righteousness**” is a repeated process. Each cycle of rebuke and correction that a man seeking wisdom goes through increases his experience and

makes him wiser. This is the process of learning righteousness: “**Who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil**” (Hebrews 5:14). A man’s relational growth will require many “approaches” over his lifetime as he confronts different aspects of his sin nature as part of his sanctification.

The pilot knows *why* he is obeying the radar operator—he wants to land on the deck safely. In the same way, knowing the goal of an increasingly intimate relationship with our Father augments a person’s willingness to embrace rebuke and correction.

Teaching, rebuking and correcting are all part of the process of wise instruction: “**Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still; teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning**” (Proverbs 9:9).

An elder shouldn’t be reluctant to pour truth and loving wisdom and necessary rebuke into the ones who look to him for guidance. After all, that’s part of a family relationship in Jesus! This relational love underlies Paul’s gentle words to his Thessalonian children in the Spirit:

*We were **so devoted to you** that we were glad to share with you not only God’s Good News but **also our own lives**, because you had become **very dear to us** (1 Thessalonians 2:8,CJB).*

“**That the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work**” refers to the need for sound training to be passed along to the next spiritual generation. No shepherd should ever forget the importance of developing successors who will carry on and expand our Lord’s faith communities: “**It is enough for the student to be like his teacher**” (Matthew 10:25).

Keep in mind that the equipping process requires *intimate knowledge* of both our Father and the person being disciplined. Just as the radar operator brings the helicopter and the flight deck safely together, so, too, a shepherd brings the Father and His children together.

What we mentioned in Lesson 44 concerning knowing your children well so that you can guide them effectively (Proverbs 22:6) is the same loving, relational principle for an elder with his extended spiritual family.

Like a parent, an elder needs to spend such significant ongoing time with the people in his care that he can appreciate their individual personalities, motivations and gifting. In this way he can prepare them for works of service, so that they’re able to cooperate with each other to extend the Kingdom of God.

An important point to consider:

We noted that an elder needs intimate personal knowledge of our Father if he’s to point others to deepening their love and obedient trust in Jesus. Much of what you know of our Lord is wrapped around painful experiences in your past from which you learned.

Some of these events were the result of your sin, while others were the fires He put you through to refine your character. Along the way of your journey, if you obtained wisdom, you also increased in your love and knowledge of our Father.

Why is it important that you understand the life preparation steps that brought you where you are today? Because to help others, you need to **reflect on past painful experiences in your own life**—those which involve your marriage, raising your children, your work trials, betrayed friendship.

For instance, in Lessons 34 and 35 we

shared our own odyssey of sorrow and disappointment that led up to us receiving the Hebraic foundations we now share. Testimonies from your past that help others can still be emotionally painful. This can be true even if you have no regret, because you can now see how our Father used the hurt to develop your character.

If you really want to serve as an elder our Father can use to model the character and love of Jesus, you need to be much more in touch with your faith family's lives than just a person who parrots Bible verses.

- **As a man of wisdom you *must reflect on your past if you are going to help others press on in practical righteousness.***
- **You *must remember the ways in which God instilled truths in you so that you mirror His compassion with those in your care.***
- **As a man who would help others you must be able to *reflect without regret so that your listeners will take hope that our Lord heals completely!***

Remember, humility and love garnished with patience will produce mature spiritual growth in the flock. As they continue to press on in Jesus, a shepherd can then proclaim with joyful satisfaction, "It's been worth it all!"

Do you get a picture of how important a wise, compassionate elder is in the development of spiritual maturity in a flock? Besides frequent contact with each, this care calls for diligence and perseverance. How would you evaluate yourself in the arena of being equipped to serve an extended spiritual family?

How do those in your care evaluate you?

9. Seek *Rhema*, Establish *Halakhahs*, Ensure They're Followed

"Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty
(Zechariah 4:6).

By this point you've noticed the frequency with which we repeat *dependence on God's guidance* through His Spirit and His Word! Sadly, so many in Christendom today frequent conferences and browse materials hoping to discover techniques that will lead to greater godliness or deeper intimacy with God. But these avenues are dead ends.

Our Father wants the Spirit of Jesus to specifically guide you in both your own trust walk and in the collective life of your fellowship family.

Our Father is restoring the Hebraic foundations, one part of which is to make known His *rhema*—His revealed will for you and your fellowship family for specific purposes and situations. We've delighted to reveal to you the facets of His restoration work in these Lessons, and how we incorporated them into our own extended spiritual family. But keep in mind that His guidance for us as we applied His truths may differ from the way He guides you!

After we'd been in Israel two months, we were seeking God's will whether we should

stay there or return to the U.S. One morning as Mike was reading the account of Jesus delivering the man of the Gadarenes from the legion of demons, this verse caught his eye: "**Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you**" (Mark 5:19). Mike had a witness in his spirit from the Holy Spirit that God might be sending us home.

A week later in the Word he came upon, "*O God of my father Abraham, God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who said to me, 'Go back to your country and your relatives, and I will make you prosper'*" (Genesis 32:9). He had the same prompting that we might be heading back.

Later that day people we fellowshiped with told us, "We've been praying about whether you should stay in Israel or return to the U.S., and God has impressed on our spirits that you are to go back." Thus we had our *rhema*, and confirmation besides!

Have you ever heard the old saying, "Don't rest on past laurels"? In our context here it means that elders who are shepherding our Lord's people can't get by on practices and knowledge that may have been effective in the past. Just as God's mercies are new every morning, so are His plans and opportunities for spiritual growth.

Shepherds who complacently neglect the people they're supposed to serve and fail to seek His guidance face dire consequences, as do the people who haven't matured in their loving trust in Jesus: "*The shepherds are **senseless and do not inquire of the Lord; so they do not prosper and all their flock is scattered***" (Jeremiah 10:21).

All people have frailties that fall short of Christ-likeness. Yet wise is the man who recognizes how seeking *rhema* for himself and his family is a training

ground for developing humility.

Consider the implications of *not* having God's revelations for your family or fellowship family: "*Without a prophetic vision, the people **throw off all restraint***" (Proverbs 29:18). Every person except our sinless Lord was born with a sin nature that looks to gratify itself. That's why mankind needs the restraints that authorities of all types have instituted.

Even when we've received the gracious gift of life in the Spirit through Jesus, we who are no longer enslaved to sin may yield to its dark impulse if we disregard His power to resist. "Unrestrained" people regress from sinful thoughts to "secret" sins to blatant, open rebellion.

However, *rhema* from the heart of our Father directly to our hearts makes us less likely to sin. His pathway is made clear, and our fellowship union in Jesus is too precious to want to cast it away for a moment of fleshly self-gratification.

As *rhema* decreases, sin increases.

As *rhema* increases, sin decreases.

Hebraic followers of Jesus were persistent in seeking God's *rhema*, His revealed will or decision, rather than leaning on their own reasoning and understanding. **Group decision-making** within the early Church came about as they relied on their Lord's specific word of direction. It's one thing to receive a *rhema* for yourself and your family, but how about the Spirit's guidance for your fellowship family?

Your earnest devotion to seek His guidance testifies that Jesus Christ is the Head of your extended spiritual family. Again, the pattern of spiritual guidance and decision-making that's experienced in the home fellowship family must be an extension of what is already practiced at the family level.

Pursuit of our Lord's continuous guidance in making wise decisions must first be a matter of priority in your *home*.

From the Hebrew Bible the early Church was able to apperceive God's sovereignty in decision making. HE has no doubts about which paths are right and good; it's we who call upon Him in trust who need His clarification!

- “*Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight*” (Proverbs 3:5,6).
- “*The Lord works out everything for His own ends...*” (Proverbs 16:4).
- “*In his heart a man plans his course, but the Lord determines his steps*” (Proverbs 16:9).

Harmonious decision-making is a crucial facet of relationships that are committed to one another and dependent on reliant trust in their Lord.

As you meditate in your Bible, you come to realize that our Father reserves the right to make your decisions for you. He is Sovereign! All He requires is for you to lovingly seek and trust Him.

- **An important aspect of decision-making is the *confidence* that people who are affected by the decision have in *the people who made it*, and in the *process they used* to make it.**

So both in your home and in your home fellowship family, be sure that the processes by which you come to decisions and determine our Father's will line up with His Word. Biblical examples

of decision-making include, but are not limited to, these examples:

A. Casting lots

The Eleven who had been hand-picked to travel with Jesus had a decision to make. Who would replace the deceased Judas Iscariot? Two who fit the qualifications were selected. Then the group prayed, asking God to make His will known.

Trusting with absolute confidence that the decision would be guided by their Lord, they followed a Proverbs principle:

“The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord” (16:33).

“Casting the lot settles disputes and keeps strong opponents apart (18:18).

Instead of taking a popularity poll or vote that could have left some wondering later if the decision had been correct, they ***“drew lots, and the lot fell to Matthias; so he was added to the apostles”*** (Acts 1:26). Any controversy over the result was defused by God's intervention.

Casting a lot today may be a toss of a coin after you've prayerfully committed the outcome to God. Whatever the means employed, the result should be beyond anyone's ability to control. Revisit Lesson 13 for Mike's story of how God confirmed through him a coin-toss decision that determined another man's career.

B. Confirmation by two or three

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure” (Jeremiah 17:9).

Any of us can be deceived into manipulating outcomes to align with what our

hearts want. Our Father is well aware of this possibility so He made sure that a scriptural pattern to help preclude that temptation was made clear in His Word: the **confirmation of two or three people**.

Autocratic decision-making by one individual was foreign to those who walked according to God's Word. The early Church's process of decision making was apperceived from the Hebrew Bible: "**A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses**" (Deuteronomy 19:15).

God Himself had established the pattern by calling upon heaven and earth as His witness with the Israelites (for example, Deuteronomy 30:19, 31:28).

The teaching of Jesus reaffirmed the beauty of agreement: "**Again, I tell you that if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven**" (Matthew 18:19).

Paul, drawing upon His Hebrew heritage, reiterated the same principle: "**Every matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses**" (2 Corinthians 13:1).

In our home fellowships we would call the individual confirmation we would give to a decision a "**witness in our spirit**". There was spirit-based confidence inside each of us that the decision we were making was God's will. We would always make sure everyone that would be effected by the decision gave their input.

The church at Antioch used a multi-dimensional approach to discern God's plan. The witness of spiritual gifts, prayer, worshiping, and fasting worked together for the prophets and teachers to set aside Paul and Barnabas for the Spirit's work through them.

*In the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers... While they were **worshipping the Lord and fasting**, the Holy Spirit said, '**Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.**' So after they had **fasted and prayed**, they placed their hands on them and sent them off" (Acts 13:1-3).*

Fasting had been a component of spiritual life for centuries. Denying the flesh to focus on spiritual matters signified a wholehearted dependence on God for the answers sought.

Never lose sight of the fact that our God has not left us to struggle alone to discern His will. Helping others to seek our Lord's guidance is load-bearing. Like Paul, earnestly ask God on behalf of one another to "**fill you with the knowledge of His will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding**" (Colossians 1:9).

Seek Him in your prayer closet and diligently study His Word and listen to His Spirit for *rhema*. As you entrust yourself to Him, He'll use you to help others in your fellowship family discern that which is pleasing to Him for His good purposes to be fulfilled.

A special result we've noticed over the years about the confirmation of two or three is that it's harder for Satan to thwart your plans. Because each of us has fallen prey to his schemes individually at one time or another, he's aware of our weaknesses. He knows from past experience what choices each of us is likely to make alone.

But when we brought Jesus into our midst by confirming a decision through two or three witnesses, the outcome was different than one of us would probably have made alone. The devil had a tough time with not knowing what we would do *collectively*, so he couldn't easily get out ahead of us to thwart the decision.

While we could relate many testimonies of collective confirmation through two or three, just remember: God's plans for major decisions were meant to be collective rather than isolated!

lowship family until you've developed biblical applications.

In Lesson 7 we noted that seeking *rhema* humbled people just as gathering manna each day in dependence on God's loving bounty humbled the Israelites. *Humility* and *love for God* are two important safeguards you want nurtured in your fellowship family.

Again, it's for the benefit of each home and your fellowship family to prayerfully establish appropriate *halakhahs*. These biblical principles by which you live are like stones of spiritual protection with which our Lord surrounds each home in your extended spiritual family.

We've shared the process of establishing *halakhahs* in Lesson 7.

[We encourage you to read and discuss our book, *Christian Halakhahs, Loving Jesus Through the Way You Apply His Word*, a free download.]

Has the Holy Spirit given you any particular *rhema* concerning your fellowship family? Yes or no? If yes, what did you receive, what did you do with the revelation, and how was it received by the others?

Write down any situations you feel should have a biblical application as it pertains to your fellowship family. For instance: How should you keep the sabbath? Should you tithe? What is your process for removing an unrepentant person? List your own and then work these through with your fel-