

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 49

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES — Extended Spiritual Family:

• *Collective Considerations*

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10. Avoid Disagreements Between the Sexes



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Introduction

If you've been part of the Nicolaitan religious system for any length of time, *mutual participation* in gatherings will be something new to you. Participation for you has probably been non-existent except for singing with others and putting your money in the offering.

Usually one or a few people are in control of the typical Sunday morning performance. But this comes at a cost! When activities or relationships extend out like spokes on a wheel from the *one person who's in charge*, it makes him a **demonic target**. (This is the sacerdotal intermediary we warned you about in Lesson 19.)



An organizational religious system indoctrinates people into the role of **spectatorship** during the Sunday service, and **relational passivity** toward others throughout the week. This passivity is revealed by the lack of spontaneous interaction "the other six days" during

which one follower of Jesus helps another grow in his or her faith. Without intentional contact there is no opportunity for role modeling and the loving mutuality by which the more mature followers of Jesus come alongside the less mature for mentoring.

If this pretty much describes your faith journey thus far, then you need some dramatic Spirit-empowered change! What we're sharing is a way of life if you want to experience the relational intimacy and spiritual power of true righteousness-based, load-bearing fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP IN HOMES Extended Spiritual Family: *Collective Considerations*

1. Hand-in-Hand Fellowship

"Set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity" (1 Timothy 4:12).

"The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others" (2 Timothy 2:2).

The Hebraic home fellowship family is just that: family! No one individual is the key person on whom all relationships or activities depend. In other words, *no one* is a demonic target from



whom all other relationships flow as wheel spokes.

Relationships in a Hebraic fellowship family look more like a flock of geese in flight who honk mutual encouragement and interact by frequently switching places so each can rest while another leads the way. All during the trip, each goose is directly connected to a goose in front of it who's easing its path and one behind who is benefiting.

Our spiritual forefathers recognized that no one person can have the same relational commitment of time and energy to every person in their home fellowship family either. So each individual in the "family formation" is relationally connected to others with whom he or she has a deeper personal association.

The development of spiritual maturity in the extended spiritual family is modeled by an elder, if one is available, or by the most mature man for men and mature woman for the women. Their example by word and deed flows out through the formation to encourage each person to be responsible in their own trust journey with Jesus.

Similar to parenting, the goal for faith families is to raise mature followers of Jesus whose lives will glorify our Father and bring others into His Kingdom.

A biblical elder purposes through humble, deliberate effort to lovingly develop Christ-like successors in the faith.

Let's use another metaphor to illustrate the various relational connections within an extended spiritual family: *formations of aircraft* flying together. A fol-

lower of Jesus who is discipling another believer in a formation will usually have a closer relationship with that individual than will others in the formation. This isn't rejection of the others, but prioritizing so that each person may mutually contribute to the spiritual growth of everyone within the fellowship family.

New people enter a formation through their relationship with someone else in the "flight family". You share in spiritual family responsibilities for one another as a body by making yourself available to serve.

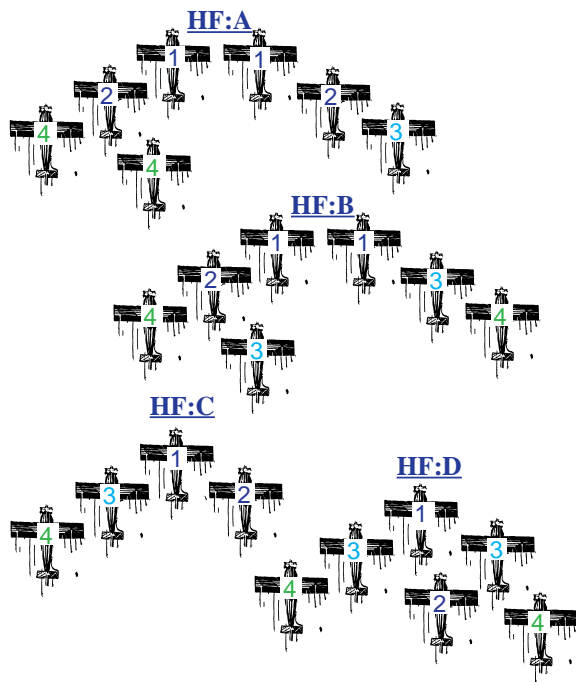
- The more mature come alongside the less mature to help them walk more fully in their relationship with Jesus.
- The less mature come alongside the more mature to draw from their life experience and mutually encourage each other in their journey with Jesus.

Within the extended spiritual family each person helps another through loving availability and service of gifting. The less mature look to those who exemplify more of Jesus in their lives, and seek them for discipling.

The earliest Church modeled the Trustee Family (see Lesson 3). Within the spiritual clan, relationships flowed out as the elder(s) served with wisdom and care the whole clan of families. Fellowship families operated like formations, led by elders who were relationally affiliated with each other. In this manner they cooperated as a "congregation" of home fellowships.

For example, in the diagram on the next page, each group (A,B,C,D) represents a home fellowship of extended spiritual family.

A Congregation Of Home Fellowships



KEY:

HF: Home Fellowship

- 1:** Qualified Elder (see Lesson 10).
- 2:** Almost Qualified; mature in years, more character development needed (possibly a Mature man).
- 3:** Men approaching maturity, continuing character development (Possibly a Wounded or Mature man).
- 4:** Younger men (possibly a Phallic or Warrior man).

The elders are discipling those who are more mature (2,3). These in turn are discipling others (3,4)—individuals who are spiritually connected to them. In this way the elders are preparing successors, and everyone is growing in maturity and learning to disciple at the same time. There is no relational passivity!

As man (2) becomes qualified in a Home Fellowship family by discipling others, he may form another home gathering with those who are flying forma-

tion on him. These other home gatherings are spiritual kin to the first ones. Succession of prepared elders is based on:

- age and spiritual maturity,
- the development of shepherding characteristics and biblical qualifications,
- a desire to serve by leading.

A fellowship family may have more than one elder serving them, with each having men flying formation on them for spiritual development (home fellowships A & B). Any fellowship family that grows so large that individual contact and care is impossible should multiply.

A key to the size of any fellowship family is the ability of the elder to render account personally for everyone in his care. This frequently overlooked admonition from Scripture can make the difference between maturing followers of Jesus and those who stay babes because they've chosen to hide out. When a fellowship family becomes too large, an elder becomes a **manager of a group** rather than a **servant leader of people**.

An interpersonal responsibility lies between those who are serving by eldering and those who are being served:

*Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they **keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account.** Let them **do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you** (Hebrews 13:17).*

It's vital that the number within each fellowship family not outgrow the ability of the elders to render account to our Lord for their spiritual development.

At the same time those in an elder's care should make it a joy for him by giv-

ing him deference (see Lesson 38).

A vivid visualization of this principle of formations, succession and growth is portrayed in the World War II movie *Twelve O'clock High*, starring Gregory Peck. As different leaders were killed in battle, others were prepared to take over leadership responsibility. We encourage you and your fellowship family to see it. Surprisingly, women often derive more from this war flick than do men!

Refer once again to the *Congregation of Home Fellowships* diagram on the previous page. Each home fellowship is served by elders who maintain relationships on behalf of their flock with other home fellowship families.

The concept of affiliation is illustrated in Acts, chapter 20, when Paul asks for one last time to meet with the elders of the church of Ephesus. He encourages these men to remember that he taught them both “*publicly and from house to house,*” where gatherings of believers met in one another’s homes.

The church at Ephesus in its many faith family communities was held together by the relational ties of its leadership and linked by the extended-family love produced by the Holy Spirit.

A particular point of reference helps keep relationships within the fellowship family pure and healthy:

The elders *pastor, or shepherd, the male heads of each household, who in turn shepherd their own families.*

Single people, including widows and divorced people, are adopted into the whole family of relationships that are represented in the home gatherings. Because of the extended-family nature of the fellowship, in the absence of fathers, the

elders share in responsibility for those who have no male head of household.

Extended spiritual family relationships are a seven-day-a-week commitment to each other. This is a *community* that is based upon knowing and living out shared biblical convictions and a loving, obedient trust in Jesus.

Intrinsic to the whole process of relational responsibility and commitment is *awareness*: Some journey to deeper spiritual growth more quickly than others. This means that someone in the body (preferably not an elder, so that others can experience discipling) will be responsible to come alongside the less mature to exercise spiritual wisdom and compassion.

Relationships within formations of believers are linked in a way that is similar to those in a sheep flock. As we led our flock out from the barn or the pasture, the lead ewe, Precious, was on our heels. The other ewes “flew formation” on her according to their age or boldness. The lambs of each ewe effectively “flew formation” on their mother. Each felt secure knowing his or her position as part of the larger flock.

An important relational point: “Flying formation” with one another requires close contact. A home fellowship that gathers within a neighborhood provides the proximity needed for relational responsibility through more frequent spontaneous interaction. Sociologists define a neighborhood in the U.S. as the distance covered in a five-minute walk from your house, or the radius of a quarter mile.

Contact with each other is more likely if it’s relatively convenient rather than a strain. If you have to drive thirty minutes through irritating traffic to see oth-

ers in your faith community, you're less likely to initiate spontaneous encounters. Our Hebraic ancestors gathered in homes in their neighborhoods, and the Bible tells us, "*The Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved*" (Acts 2:47)—and being discipled as well.

God may impress on you to start a home fellowship in your neighborhood among those with whom you've already enjoyed relationship. If you find a lot of responsiveness, especially among those who are new to walking in Jesus, you *may need* a few committed load-bearers to help you from outside your immediate neighborhood to pray with and for you.

Your initial neighborhood contacts may be only social—a barbecue, sports event, dessert with the families. You're building relational bridges that may develop into occasions to make the gospel come alive for them as they see the living Lord in you. Just make sure that you're not looking at people as "targets" to tally up on an imaginary salvation list; they'll see right through that motive! (We'll pursue this further in Lesson 50.)

Several home fellowships may decide to gather as a single congregation for worship or for spiritual opportunities such as a soup kitchen or missionary support that require the effort of many.

Mike was an elder in a home fellowship family within a congregation of home fellowships. He not only shepherded a particular fellowship, but represented them with the elders of the other home fellowships.

Those in our fellowship family had numerous contacts with each other during the week, both scheduled and spontaneous. Each Wednesday we gathered for a potluck and for whatever else seemed appropriate. No two

evenings were the same. Sometimes we shared in worship, other times in deep repentance, and still other occasions in unabashed laughter and fun. These were special family times for all of us. The children were always included with their parents. Spontaneous contacts during the week included phone calls, stopping by, babysitting, sharing errands—the sort of things you do with family.

As our home fellowship grew in size, Mike mentored two of the men to prepare them to be shepherds of two other fellowship families when we multiplied. In time we had three home fellowships who were all kin with each other. Mike stayed in touch with the two new elders and met with them weekly for mutual support. They also knew that they could call him at any time for situations about which they had questions.

The *inclusion* or *exclusion* of people happened within each home fellowship family. Even though we were part of a larger congregation of home fellowships, the responsibility of communal righteousness and one anothering remained within each extended spiritual family.

Once a month all the elders of the home fellowships and their wives gathered together. Often we'd initially break up into two groups, men and women. This gave us a chance to talk over gender issues that we were facing in our respective fellowships. We found these times invaluable in gaining wisdom from the more mature. We'd usually end with all of us sharing together in worship or prayer or conversation—whatever it seemed the Holy Spirit wanted....

The home fellowships met together each Sunday for combined worship with other fellowship families. (We rented a gymnastics center that wasn't used Sunday mornings.) Our fellowship family showed up an hour early so the children could play with each other. The adults also enjoyed this time! We all caught up with each other over

prayer and coffee. We were such a close-knit extended family that during the time of worship it was impossible to tell whose children were whose. We often all sat together and the little ones nestled on the laps of their spiritual “aunts and uncles.” Mike would often have a couple little ones on his lap.

On most Sundays different families from our fellowship would spend the afternoon together in wonderful shared experiences. And when we were apart, we were all involved in ways to reach the unsaved in our neighborhoods and workplaces.

2. The Role of Older Women

“She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue”

(Proverbs 31:26).

While older men serve as elders within their fellowship families, older women play an important role as well. We mentioned how important the *power of influence* is in Lesson 41, and women have great influence indeed in their families and circle of relationships.

The biblical precedent for a righteous woman of virtue was found in Proverbs 31:10-31. Just as every devout man aspired to the wisdom of an elder or sage, so every righteous woman looked to the Proverbs 31 matron as her role model of an older, virtuous woman.



That this passage refers to a senior lady is indicated by verse 23: ***“Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.”*** Since the man is an elder among the people, his wife is most likely an older woman who has earned the respect of her community.

To expect a young woman with toddlers to fulfill the many responsibilities that were designed for a mature woman would be cruel and unrealistic. However, as a goal or ideal, the passage was encouragement for a younger woman's future.

The widows and older women of each fellowship family whose husbands served as elders were perhaps the likeliest candidates to fulfill the assignment listed in Paul's letter to Titus:

*Teach the older women to be **reverent** in the way they live, **not to be slanderers or addicted** to much wine, but to **teach what is good**. Then they can train the younger women to **love their husbands and children**, to be **self-controlled and pure**, to be **busy at home**, to be **kind**, and to be **subject to their husbands** so that no one will malign the word of God (Titus 2:3-5).*

Scripture often warns women against being idle busybodies and quarrelsome nags: ***“The wise woman builds her house, but with her own hands the foolish one tears hers down”*** (Proverbs 14:1). How needful it was in biblical times (and even more essential today!) for women to have access to mature, godly women who were willing to speak lovingly and forthrightly about righteousness and obedience—and to live it as well.

How each woman lives out the many passages that specifically address godliness in women requires the development of personal *halakhahs*. The older women in a faith community can help the younger ones study and apply Ephesians 5, 1 Peter 3, Proverbs 31 and all the other passages that deal especially with women. With this kind of scriptural guidance shared in relational love, each woman can incorporate the specific areas

of application that God is prompting in her spirit.

Think of how Peter's mother-in-law set an example for her daughter by eagerly serving the Messiah Who had just healed her! Think of the spiritual conversations the two women probably shared while Peter was on his intimate journeys with Jesus, and how prepared that younger woman was to later accompany her husband on his missions for the sake of the Gospel (see 1 Corinthians 9:5)!

Don't underestimate the powerful influence of an older saint to lovingly lead in righteousness a willing younger follower of Jesus.

If you are an older woman, describe your lifestyle and what you do to help the younger women in your fellowship family.

What have you learned from your earlier life experiences that could be helpful in guiding younger women to love their husbands and children?

3. NO Two Fellowships Alike

“Since you are eager to have spiritual gifts, try to excel in gifts that build up the church” (1 Corinthians 14:12).

When several formations of bombers are sent into battle, they fly at different altitudes so the anti-aircraft guns on the ground can't "draw a bead" on them. Each formation may be assigned targets that differ from those of other formations. The planes in each formation may carry different types of bombs depending on their target. This diversity is both necessary and desirable.

In a similar vein, not all sheep flocks are raised for the same purpose. Our sheep flock was initially made up of Suffolks, tall hardy sheep bred for meat production. In the spring this breed normally birthed two lambs that could be fattened for meat in the winter. The only drawback of Suffolks was the somewhat inferior quality of their wool. Another sheep flock may be comprised primarily of Romneys. These are bred for their high wool quality but are not the best meat producers.

What is illustrated by the characteristics of the various sheep breeds and bomber formations has parallels for our faith communities. Because of the different giftings of the people in each one, the variety of ages and background, the different types of life experiences and levels of spiritual maturity, home fellowships aren't clones of each other.

Our Lord may have very unique purposes for drawing together these particular people as extended spiritual family. That's certainly motivation for you to discover His purpose for *your* faith family!

[For more on how spiritual gifts can help determine the purpose of a home fellowship, see our book **God's Instruments For War: Discovering and Coordinating Spiritual Gifts as Weapons of Warfare**, a free download.]

4. Family Gatherings

“Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity” (1 Timothy 5:1,2).

“This is my family” is the core understanding for each elder and individual in your faith community. *Relationship*, not organization, is the critical reflection of Who Jesus is in your lives both individually and collectively as an expression of His body.

Your shared lives together are “spiritual family gatherings,” not church services held in a home. These are opportunities to eat together, to enjoy one another, and especially to get to know each other as brothers and sisters in Jesus. And because children are cherished by the King of the Kingdom, their participation should be the norm rather than the exception.

As with gatherings of your relatives, everyone doesn’t always sit together the whole time. There’s an ebb and flow in the activities. And since God created people in two genders, it’s important to provide opportunity for gender-specific discussion and sharing on occasion as well.

Men in particular need the example and help of other men to establish wise *halakhahs* for their homes. This time together may happen naturally during the “family” gathering of the home fellowship. Or, the men can get together outside the family gatherings.

Mike met with the men once a week in the morning before work to discuss issues specific to men. A fruit of those discussions was the fostering of increased interaction between the men and their wives and children. When heads of households meet together to establish *halakhahs*, they are

practicing mutual submission as they share ideas, deference and respect for each other. And that humble attitude carries over into other relationships, such as their family!

Women, too, need meaningful time with other women. Spiritual mothers are best able to help younger ones through the complex situations that they and their families encounter. Older women can also help younger women learn to laugh at life’s circumstances. And, they can help them deal with the fear and anxiety that come with the roles of wife and mother, and the loneliness and worry that may plague those who are single or alone.

5. Thoroughly Talk Things Over

“Those who feared the LORD talked with each other, and the LORD listened and heard. A scroll of remembrance was written in His presence concerning those who feared the LORD and honored His name” (Malachi 3:16).

In Lesson 48 we discussed decision-making. An *interpersonal* element relates to effective decision-making. Those in your faith



community should sense the freedom to share spiritual wisdom and suggest extended-family activities to the rest of the body. If whatever you discuss will affect others, you should ensure that there is **thorough discussion**. What we mean is that everyone should be able to have their say, and encouraged to do so.

An elder or someone who is moderating a discussion should:

Make sure everyone has opportunity to share their input during the discussion, and that ALL voice their agreement or disagreement before you finalize a decision.

This is important so that everyone knows what is TRULY in the heart of those who participate:

The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For out of the overflow of his heart his mouth speaks (Luke 6:45).

As we've mentioned several times throughout these lessons:

When necessary, take the time to discern the *scriptural basis* for each matter, and pray for God's *rhema* as to whether a particular practice or activity is His will.

Discussion and apperception create a give-and-take humility that's conducive to the growth of Christ-like character in each person. An elder or some other designated person can facilitate a thorough discussion.

Any discussion that has the possibility of fostering strong disagreement when your faith community is gathered for fellowship should be tabled if possible until the men can gather together privately. It's far better to be willing to wait for God to make a situation plain (Philippians 3:15) than to create a breach in fellowship:

Starting a quarrel is like breaching a dam; so drop the matter before a dispute breaks out (Proverbs 17:14; see also 13:10).

In your family and fellowship family, how would you evaluate the thoroughness of your discussions? Do they leave apprehension in anyone?

6. Don't Spill Your Guts!

Sensitivity groups became popular in the American therapy culture during the sixties and seventies. Participants sat



in a circle and were urged to be transparent with one another. They were encouraged to share everything about themselves, no matter how intimate. We've seen home fellowships unwittingly replicate sensitivity groups to their own destruction.

Scripture offers no basis for unabashed blurting in extended-family gatherings. Confessing your faults "*one to another*" as commanded by James does not involve the presence of the whole faith community! In that particular context, the elders were anointing a sick person who may or may not have had sin at the root of his illness.

Those who share personal information with a wide audience may or may not be seeking help. In fact, they may be sharing one-sided information that's actually slander or gossip—not the sort of sharing Jesus modeled or taught.

When this kind of "transparency" occurs on a regular basis in home gatherings, children are often ushered out due to the "adult" nature of the conversa-

tion. Don't let the children of your fellowship family ever feel expendable. If someone truly is seeking counsel, schedule time to privately discuss the matter.

The gathering of the home fellowship family shouldn't be a therapy session. This is why *relational connectedness* with one or two throughout the week who can come alongside to pray, fast, and counsel with a distressed brother or sister is so vital. Vulnerability in private with load-bearers is certainly appropriate and needed.

But when people hold on to problems for days so that they can dump them on the faith community when it gathers, they're violating the spirit of relational responsibility. Those who see the gathering as a forum to focus on self rather than on God or on others need a private rebuke and assistance.

Body life is seven-day-a-week connectedness. Those needing help can call on the individuals with whom they are most connected at a time when help will be most conducive.

Gatherings of extended spiritual family are times of jubilation and loving expression to our Father and to each other. There are times, however, when a brother or sister has encountered a negative situation just prior to the gathering. Finding help within the fellowship family at that time may be your most loving course of action. Emergencies happen!

*If one of you has a son or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not **immediately pull him out**?* (Luke 14:5).

Something to consider:

If personal information about yourself helps a brother or sister who is going through the same situation in which

you have received victory, it's helpful to share it. Sometimes people just need to know that there really is light at the end of their particular tunnel.

Make sure you really have gotten victory before you share. The other person doesn't need commiseration—he needs hope in the *faithfulness of Jesus!* His journey will be all the more difficult if he becomes dependent on you rather than on God.

Keep this in mind as you come alongside a struggling brother or sister:

True fellowship is believers trusting God together.

True ministry is one believer helping another to trust God more.

In your fellowship family, how do you help each other when problems occur?

How would you handle a situation in which someone blurted out inappropriate personal matters during a faith family gathering? Has this occurred?

7. Laying On Hands

Our earliest forefathers in the faith knew that *spiritual power* is imparted through laying hands on others. For instance, in ancient Israel, the priests laid hands on a sacrificial animal to make reconciliation between the people and God (Exodus 29:10). An individual offering a sacrifice



would place his hands on the animal as his substitute so that his sins would be transferred to it.

To lay hands on a person for prayer and anointing was an important public sign of recognition that someone was being anointed for holy purposes: “*Then [Moses] laid his hands on [Joshua] and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses*” (Numbers 27:23).

While the actual process or ceremony of an elder laying hands on a person is not clearly delineated in Scripture, we do see many precedents. Not only was Joshua’s authority made sure through Moses, but another necessary facet for the younger man’s command resulted:

Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses (Deuteronomy 34:9).

Jesus Himself laid hands on the little children to pray for them (see Matthew 19:13-15), just as it was customary for Jewish fathers to lay their hands on the heads of their own children to bless them each Sabbath evening. Jesus also healed many by laying His hands on them. Why would they lay hands on these individuals if something didn’t pass spiritually through their hands?

The earliest church at Jerusalem selected seven men to replace the apostles in caring for the widows. These seven were presented to the apostles, “*who prayed and laid their hands on them*” (Acts 6:6) to set them apart.

In the city of Samaria, the Spirit was given to the believers at the laying on of the apostles’ hands (see Acts 8:18,19). Paul himself was healed and filled with

the Spirit when Ananias laid his hands on him (see Acts 9:17).

The writer of the Book of Hebrews seems to indicate that laying on hands was well-enough known to be referred to as an “elementary teaching” (see Hebrews 6:1,2).

Timothy had received a gift from God that came into him through the laying on of Paul’s hands, and another spiritual gift when “*the body of elders laid their hands on [him]*” (see 1 Timothy 4:14).

The custom of laying on hands seems to be aimed at invoking the anointing of the Spirit’s power as it had with the seventy elders who assisted Moses.

The Bible provides for *fathers* and *elders* to lay hands on people: fathers to bless their children and elders for healing and anointing. Those with *gifts of healing* from the Spirit also impart that through laying on hands.

A Sober Warning:

On the other hand, Timothy was warned to be discerning before laying hands on people: “*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). Here we see that something can pass between a person who has unconfessed sin and the person who lays hands on him.

Something evil can happen when the righteous lay hands on the unrighteous! And the same transfer can occur when the unrighteous lay hands on the righteous.

In our experience, not only Holy Spirit anointing can be imparted through laying on hands, but also the activity of demonic spirits. The past several decades

have seen a proliferation of people laying hands on each other in prayer. We've studied this, and believe that the epidemic of bitterness in believers today is in part a result of an unscriptural use of laying on hands.

We are witnesses to this: If the Holy Spirit can be imparted through the laying on of hands, so can *demonic influences*. An example:

Sue suffered an onslaught of depression and anxiety after an older, bitter woman who is highly connected in a well-known international prayer ministry came to our office one day and laid hands on Sue and prayed.

Only later did she tell us that she had divorced her husband many years earlier because "God told me to do it so I could marry a more godly man." (Oh, brother!) We were naive to let this happen and suffered the consequences.

Later we met another married woman who underwent severe depression as a result of the same person who had laid hands on Sue. We've heard other such horror stories. People who had not been plagued by bitterness at all were hounded by it after someone laid hands on them.

Maybe we followers of Jesus need to wear a sign: "Keep your unrighteous hands to yourself!"

What has been your understanding of laying on hands and its purpose?

Write down what you believe is the biblical basis for laying hands on other people. Include who can do this and the limits the Bible places on its use.

8. Silence the Sacerdotal

"I wrote to the church, but Diotrephes, who loves to be first, will have nothing to do with us" (3 John 1:9).

We noted in Lesson 19 the sacerdotal intermediary who tries to come between you and our Lord, and we want to reinforce our warn-



ing. There will always be the temptation for people who have talent or skill in certain areas to put themselves above others or see themselves as indispensable agents of God in your fellowship family.

Often, this person has accumulated a lot more Bible knowledge than he's applied to his life. Other types of sacerdotal are those who "sweat the outcome" of some facet in your gathering, be it the music, the cooking, the activities, the conversation. As a result, they try to **take control**. Be wary of anyone who relies heavily on prepared materials as your primary reason to gather!

If any of these situations habitually occur, you have the return of the **sacerdotal**, an intermediary trying to stand between you and Jesus through a personal agenda. Wherever you have a sacerdotal you'll find someone quenching and grieving the Holy Spirit.

Whenever someone takes over control, the Spirit's input is missed.

If an intermediary take-charge person arises, your fellowship family will grow more passive in their spiritual walk. Your

gatherings will take on religious form, and any experience you once had with Jesus in your midst will fade. We encourage you: stop the sacerdotal that he might repent and the spiritual family return to Spirit-dependent, joyous-in-Christ life.

Is your family fellowship a gathering of mutual participation as a body, or are do certain people tend to dominate? Are you one of these people?

What would it take for men within your fellowship family to make time for each other as brothers growing in Jesus? For the women to come alongside one another?

9. Terminate Communication Killers

“For in his own eyes he flatters himself too much to detect or hate his sin”

(Psalms 36:2).

The U.S. has developed into a culture that spends more time **talking at** each other than **talking with** one another. People share facts and information, but spend little time in interactive discussion learning the values and insights of the other person(s). Many who have sat listening to sermons from behind a pulpit have had this practice of being talked at role-modeled for them.



In order for interactive discussion to be regained in our faith families, certain hindrances need to be corrected and helpful styles of communication taught.

Common hindrances you’ll probably encounter at some point in your gatherings include people who:

- **talk too much or too little;**
- **cut off others or end sentences for them;**
- **launch into sarcasm or lengthy criticism of others;**
- **fixate on a topic, or shift to an unrelated topic;**
- **dwell in the past, or fantasize about the future.**

A warm and conducive communication climate for the faith family is a relational environment an elder should highly encourage! Family in Jesus need to know they can talk openly and be heard, yet not step on the dignity of others by overbearing control or conversational manipulation.

Open family communication reinforces the strength of commitment to each other, and paves the way for creative thinking and pursuit.

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit is much more evident where peace exists.

Describe yourself as a communicator. How do you handle interruption or rudeness?

Ask others to evaluate you.

10. Avoid Disagreements Between the Sexes

It’s wise to keep strong differences from occurring between men and

women in your fellowship family. An argumentative man may inadvertently violate Peter's exhortation that men and women *are* different, and husbands have a special responsibility toward their wives no matter what the setting:



*You husbands likewise, live with your wives **in an understanding way**, as with a weaker vessel, **since she is a woman**; and grant her **honor as a fellow heir** of the grace of life, so that your **prayers may not be hindered** (1 Peter 3:7).*

Make every effort to keep other men in your faith family from infringing on a husband's consideration of his wife. Protect the women in your fellowship from men who try to dominate. Too often men press their point and go too far in their discussion:

*Keep reminding them of these things. **Warn them before God against quarreling about words**; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen. Don't have anything to do with **foolish and stupid arguments**, because you know they **produce quarrels** (2 Timothy 2:14,23).*

On the other hand, if a controlling or quarrelsome woman insists on arguing, her husband (if he is present) should ask her to stop. If she is single, widowed, or divorced, the elder should ask her to refrain.

Men who are confronted by controlling women eventually drift away from the faith family in frustration. It's a "no win" scenario to deal with a contentious woman, especially if she's not in your own household:

Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife. Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife (Proverbs 21:9,19).

A quarrelsome or argumentative woman is best helped by the mature women in the extended spiritual family who can come alongside her on a consistent and caring basis.

Describe your interaction with members of the opposite sex in your extended spiritual family. Do you make them apprehensive?

Ask for feedback.

How have you handled situations in which verbal sparring threatened the peace of your gathering as faith family? How did others respond?

Recommended Further Reading

- February 2001 Newsletter: *Don't Let the Coyote Eat Your Child(ren)*
- July 2001 Newsletter: *Wholeheartedness Toward God—A Life of Adaptation*
- August 2001 Newsletter: *Walking in the Holy Spirit in an Age of Concupiscence*
- February 2002 Newsletter: *Our Father's Purpose and Criteria for Fellowship in Him*
- May 2002 Newsletter: *Does the Lord See You Determined for Him?*
- August 2002 Newsletter: *Restoring Covenant-based Communities: A Warning and a Call to Action!*