

Hebraic Home Fellowships Must Produce Godly Generations

*Training Succeeding Generations To Follow Jesus
Is An Inter-Generational Responsibility*

Part 3

The Relational Connectedness of the Early Church
Spiritual Tribalism



Introduction to Part 3

Sometimes you might think it's easier to just ignore the events going on in the world because your own life is so overwhelming. But our Father has called some of us to sound the alarm to awaken His people! Be sure of this: Alert watchmen *aren't* welcomed by those who want to retain power or status quo in their system, be it government or religious.

Winston Churchill, the Prime Minister of England two generations ago, warned his government time and again about the insidious power of Adolf Hitler. Did they gratefully receive his insight? No! He was ostracized by his countrymen.

Even when witnesses escaped from the concentration camps and traveled at great risk throughout Europe to reveal the reality of the gas chambers and death camps, few among either the citizenry or the governing authorities were willing to believe or intervene.

In each generation there is a handful who discern the nature of the evil around them and have the courage to voice the warning. Initially, only a few, a remnant, heed the warning and choose to take appropriate action.

Who are the ones today whose love for God and His Word arm them to take a stand against Satan's ploys? Please heed seriously the warning of God's Word: *"Like a muddied spring or a polluted well is a righteous man who gives way to the wicked"* (Proverbs 25:26).

Pragmatism, the concept that whatever works is justifiable, infuses both the government and western Christendom today. As in the corporate world, any means is acceptable as long as it sells. Neither the Hellenist/Roman church institution nor the State is concerned with whether their motives or actions are right before God. Government as well as institutional religious leadership are single-minded: maintain power by keeping the system running smoothly.

Masquerading as "benevolence", the government provides compulsory public education to divert the loyalty of children away from their parents. Sadly, many parents are satisfied to be relieved of their responsibility to raise up Godly children.

Paralleling government control, congregational leaders assume a husband/father's responsibility. They teach not only your children but also your wife! Far too many men compare themselves to the "educated" clergy or youth workers and find they fall short of their biblical knowledge. Therefore they're misguidedly glad to give over their families to be taught by the "professionals".

Most men have no idea of how heinous this forfeiture of responsibility is to God. Nowhere in the Bible is *outsourcing* our families supported. As you'll see in Part 3, the home, supported by the extended spiritual family of the home fellowship, is our Father's means of raising up godly generations.

Our Father is prepared to help His people regain what has been stolen. All *you* need is the conviction of David when he faced Goliath: *"You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied"* (1 Samuel 17:45). With God as your focus, it just takes a precise pebble launched and empowered by His Spirit in you.

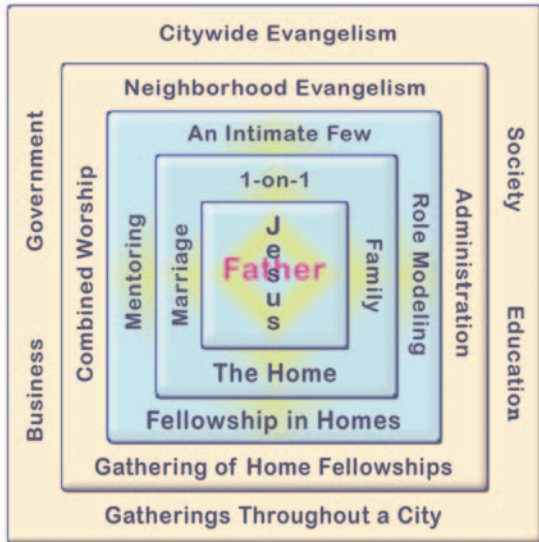
Don't despise those who enjoy religious entertainment that's emptied of conviction and repentance. Keep your eyes on the "Author and Finisher of your faith." To Him alone do you owe your allegiance! He's been waiting for some time for you to take your stand and begin to live as the Church He is building!

Part 3

The Relational Connectedness of the Early Church

Spiritual Tribalism

Relational Priorities of the Early Church



Please examine closely this diagram. It embodies the *relational priorities* of the early Church that illustrate the KINGDOM to which you belong. Look at it in the form of a tiered wedding cake. The top and most essential layer represents your trust-filled, ongoing Covenant relationship with our Father and Jesus through His indwelling Holy Spirit. Your ongoing Covenant relationship is critical to every other layer in the diagram.

Living in Covenant union with our Father under the Lordship of Jesus must always be the primary consideration in your motivations and in your actions. *“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).

When you *trust* in our Lord Jesus and *receive His guidance*, you accomplish far more than man’s reasoning ever could. As the prophet Isaiah makes clear, our Lord’s ways and His very thoughts are far beyond our finite ability to reason them out through mental effort (see Isaiah 55:8,9).

The Hebraic foundations need to be *experienced* as your response to His Spirit and His Word, especially your trust-filled relationship with Jesus our King. As you live out His commands in an obedient trust that’s grounded in love, you demonstrate a lifestyle of ongoing experience that evidences you belong to Him.

[For further detail see our Hebraic Article: *The Gospel Of The Covenant Is The Pilgrimage To Salvation*. Also, see *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*, Lessons 24 thru 29.]

Note from the diagram that next in relational priority is your *home*, then your *home fellowship* of loadbearing, extended spiritual family.

[These two relational priorities are explored in Lessons 30 thru 50 of *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*; and in *The Home and The Home Fellowship* portions of our video series, *Jesus In Your Home*.]

Congregations of home fellowships who gather periodically and congregations throughout your city are the *fruit* of the inner three priorities. Every faith community is linked by the Spirit to every other faith community of Jesus-followers in the world. The health of each fellowship is directly dependent on:

- Individual and communal abiding in union with Jesus.
- Spiritually healthy marriages and families.
- The determination of the fellowship family to fulfill our Father’s goals and objectives.

When these three inner tiers of foundational relationships are healthy and fulfill their respective purposes as God would have them, much fruit can be born to the glory of our Father as His Kingdom expands through them.

Our Founding Fathers Sought Tribal Wisdom. *Why Didn't the Church?*

Were you aware that the men who were responsible for forming the foundations of the colonial government sought the wisdom of the Native people around them? Benjamin Franklin invited leaders of the Iroquois Nation to explain their system of tribal government and leadership to a gathering of Anglo leaders in Albany, New York. The Iroquois model helped the special delegation write "The Albany Plan of Union", which served as a pattern later for the Articles of Confederation and, ultimately, the Constitution of the United States.

The drafters of our Constitution embraced the Native form of *elder leadership*, which formed the basis to this nation being established as a **republic**.

Delve with us back into United States history. The Founding Fathers had warned repeatedly that the government of the republic should never become a democracy. As a **republic**:

- **The best leaders at the local or regional level were elected as state legislators.**
- **The best leaders at the state level were selected to represent them at the federal level.**

Leadership concern revolved around what benefited *each representative's section* of the country as well as what was best for the *nation as a whole*.

A century later, with the advent of the *popular vote* — the cornerstone of democracy — politicians who appealed to the *self-interest of the individual* found themselves elected. The sense of connectedness with the rest of the nation's needs and greater good was diminished as each man looked instead to how he might achieve his *own special interest*.

As this nation was formed, various expressions of Christianity battled among themselves about governing practices. Having only an organizational concept of itself and little

or no *relational* foundation, European Christendom was divided by creed into many competing denominations. Hellenist thought and Roman organization had removed it far from its relational beginnings as *extended spiritual family*. Over the centuries Hellenist/Roman leadership models have produced all manner of church government forms, such as:

- **autocratic congregations in which clergy rule;**
- **virtual monarchies such as the papacy;**
- **democracies in the Congregationalist tradition.**

The organizational, non-relational mindset of colonial Christendom was also *non-tribal*. Unable to see beyond Hellenist/Roman forms of church government, leadership missed the relational beauty that God had revealed through the Native people. God brought Europeans to Native peoples who were already living out the Hebraic relational pattern of the earliest Church. Perhaps *together* the colonists and the Natives could have experienced more of God's KINGDOM if the Gospel and a biblical practice of government had merged.

The sad testament to the failure of western religion is readily apparent. For over four hundred years Christian missionaries have tried to evangelize Native Americans. In most tribes the Christian conversion rate has been only 3-6% effective.

The Gospel of Jesus Christ has not lost its power! Rather, the form of *church organization* that the Hellenist-influenced missionaries and clergy brought with them alienated the Native people.

- **Hellenism's influence throughout Christendom introduced the Native American to the young, educated clergyman who lacked the wisdom of life experience. If they were to accept the Gospel on his terms, the Native people would have to submit to his immaturity. The absence of wise older men in authority to share with the Native elders made Christianity as a whole suspect.**

- **The Roman organizational format introduced the Native American to impersonal, non-interactive forms of government. Denominational leadership headquartered many miles distant put control of creed and doctrine in the hands of men with whom the Native could not sit in council. As a result, the Native people were not permitted to apply biblical truth to their own culture. Others from afar commanded them what their beliefs must be.**

The missionaries and clergy, influenced as they were by Hellenist thought and Roman organization, failed to realize that Native American society was an exact duplicate of the biblical-tribal form — *extended family*. [For more on republics and Christendom, see our Hebraic Articles: *A Time for the Men of Issachar; The Unsteeped Church; and Discussing How To Restore the Early Church, Lesson 21.*]

The Chain of Authority: Tribal Cohesion

Most cooperative endeavors which require large numbers of people are organized into *smaller, readily overseen units*. Smaller units of people make it easier to maintain personal relationships and to succeed in meeting specified goals and objectives because there is a *direct line of responsibility*. That direct line of responsibility is called a *chain of authority*, or a *chain of command*, as it's referred to in the military. The chain of authority is simply the means by which one person is responsible to someone else up the chain.

Consider the modern Army. The chain of authority begins with an individual, who belongs to a squad, which belongs to a platoon, which is part of a company, which is contained in a battalion. Battalions make up brigades, and brigades make up the Army Corps. The army's success, in part, is made possible by its recognized chain of authority throughout the entire organization.

In Luke 7, the Roman officer whose servant was healed by Jesus *in absentia* referred

to this sequence of authority. Since he himself was under authority, he clearly perceived Jesus as a Man under authority (His Father's). Both recognized in each other the humble deference needed for a chain of authority to operate. Jesus could say of the centurion, "*I tell you, I have not found such great trust even in Israel*" (Luke 7:9). The chain of authority and the humility to serve in leadership within that chain is what makes it successful.

The nation of Israel represented a particular chain of authority as an integral part of its relational connectedness.

ISRAEL

- **An individual belonged to a family**
- **A family belonged to a clan**
- **The clan belonged to a tribe**
- **The tribe belonged to a nation**

At each level, appropriate elders led the people and passed along wisdom to the next generation. Each level would select the best of their elders to represent them at the next level up the chain. This is the norm of leadership in most tribal societies today. This is a republic form of government.

The *relational connectedness* of the earliest Church paralleled that of Israel:

EARLIEST CHURCH

- **An individual belonged to a family**
- **A family belonged to committed, extended spiritual family — a home fellowship**
- **The Home fellowship belonged to others— A Congregation of Home Fellowships**
- **The Congregation of Home Fellowships belonged to all — citywide, nationally, internationally.**

Whether it's the army, Israel, or the early Church, you'll always find *promotion* and *succession* to perpetuate leaders who *serve* as they *lead with wisdom*.

- **A promotion** of leadership. Men of maturity and wisdom were recognized and given greater responsibility.

- A *succession* of current leadership. Younger men were trained to succeed the current leaders as the latter were promoted or died.

Relational connectedness was the hallmark of Israel and the earliest Church. Those in authority knew *personally* the men for whom they were immediately responsible, and prepared them to succeed them in leading.

The Influence of Hellenism Destroyed God’s Chain of Authority

During the second and third centuries Christianity became increasingly more Hellenist and anti-Semitic. Meeting in homes to share fellowship in Jesus was forfeited as Hellenists introduced meeting in pagan temples — later called “churches”. As a result Christendom relinquished the relational intimacy of its origins as people began to gather for religious performances in impersonal pagan-style edifices.

Steeple, pews, podiums and clergy were part of the pagan religious performance that isolated the sacred from the secular. The *Hebraic* spiritual responsibility of elders who knew the people personally shifted to *Hellenist* young professional clergy who separated themselves from the people. Lost was the understanding of *why* the home gatherings that had existed among the Christians of the earliest Church had been such a *way of life*.

[For more on the Hellenist influence see Chapter 6 of *Restoring the Early Church, “Greek Philosophy in the Church: How Did Plato Displace God?”*]

- List what you believe the duties of clergy are.

- What is the biblical support for what you’ve written?

Early Christians Were A Spiritual Tribe

During the time of Jesus, the earliest believers were Israelites, descendants of the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Engrained in their heritage was a tribal understanding of extended family. The first Hebrew, Abraham, was a tribal leader chosen by the God Who had entered into covenant with him. From the descendants of Abraham came the entire Hebrew nation of Israel. As we’ve shown, the nation was made up of extended-family relationships. At each level appropriate elders *collectively* led their people.

The typical Jewish farming village at the time of Jesus consisted of 10 or 15 close-knit families who depended on each other. They were like one large family, and what affected one affected the other. Their relational dependence was vital for their survival.

Emanating from their Hebraic roots, the earliest church could be most accurately depicted as a *spiritual tribe*. It was within the small, **clan-sized groups of home fellowships** that individuals and families received the mutual support and accountability that was needed for successful Kingdom living.

Authority among the Hebrews was entrusted to elders who operated within a council. The council form of decision making is Scriptural, as exemplified in the consensus of town elders to give Naomi’s property to Boaz. The *collective* aspect of council is also seen in Proverbs 31:23: “Her husband is respected at the city gate, where **he takes his seat among the elders of the land.**”

We also get an insight into the role of an elder from the Book of Job:

*When I went out to the gate by the city,
When I took my seat in the open square...*

I delivered the poor who cried out, The fatherless and the one who had no helper. The blessing of a perishing man came upon me, And I caused the widow’s heart to sing for joy.

I put on righteousness, and it clothed me; My justice was like a robe and a turban. I was eyes to the blind, And I was feet to the

*lame. I was a father to the poor,
And I searched out the case that I did
not know. I broke the fangs of the wicked,
And plucked the victim from his teeth (Job
29:7,12-17).*

These older men of proven wisdom and experience realized that close-knit relationships, especially with each other, were conducive to community and accountability. Close camaraderie was important not only among themselves but also with those for whom they were responsible. Shepherds were directed to “understand the condition of their flocks” in the spiritual realm as well as the physical (see Proverbs 27:23).

To truly lead as a biblical elder, you must know personally the ones in your direct care. Consider this comparison:

- **Hellenist philosophy/Roman organization is impersonal. It defines people as “functionaries”, that is, warm bodies needed to keep the religious system operating and paid for. Leadership controls and directs, “lording it over the people.”**
- **The Hebraic extended spiritual family dignifies people as made in their Creator’s image. People are cared for personally as if they were caring for the Lord Himself. Leaders are “servants of those they lead.”**

People of western European ancestry often have a difficult time understanding tribal relationships. The concepts of *extended family* and *family heritage* are beyond the experience of many westerners whose immigrant ancestors left these concepts behind when they came to America.

For many of western European descent, individualism and fragmented family relationships predominate. However, the early Church and its relational fabric can only be fathomed by understanding the *tribal family foundations* upon which it was built. Today, through the Hebraic Restoration, the biblical sense of our forefathers’ relational priorities is being restored to the Church.

The “Church” Is God’s People, Not A Place

In the absence of tribal understanding, Hellenism and its partner, Roman organization, have warped the biblical definition of “church.” Most today who hear that word think in terms of a place, an organization, religious programs, or allegiance to a denominational creed.

The Greek word “*ekklesia*” which is often translated “church” really means “called-out ones”. The “church” is extended spiritual family who have been *called out by Jesus* to be His family of ambassadors (see 2 Corinthians 5:20) on earth and in heaven.

The church are those whom our Lord *called out* from the world as His own. “Church” refers not to a place — “Let’s go to church” — but to God’s people — “We are the church!” Paul penned a number of his letters to the “*called-out ones*” whose primary spiritual support was the loadbearing fellowship they shared in their homes as a “clan” of extended spiritual family.

In a sense, the tribal leader Abraham was the first “*called-out one*,” since God had called him out of Chaldea to the land of Canaan. Abraham *trusted* and *obeyed* God as the “*called-out ones*” today are called to do. In Jesus, His followers are a “spiritual tribe”. Unlike the biological tribal identification that comes passively at birth, your identification as “follower of Jesus” comes only as a result of deep heart conviction in response to the Holy Spirit. You live out that walk in obedient trust by serving God in His KINGDOM.

Remember the words of Jesus as He describes Kingdom living in terms of *family*:

***“Whoever does the will of My Father
in heaven is My brother and sister and
mother” (Matthew 12:50).***

Spiritual Tribalism: Succession of Leadership

Tribal understanding with its emphasis on family-style relationships is exactly what is needed in order for you to recapture the

biblical, relational vitality of your Christian-Hebraic forefathers.

Intergenerational thinking:

**Who will succeed me in my responsibilities?
Who will care for the generations to come?**

While Hellenism brings in educated strangers from afar to lead faith communities, Hebraic leadership is “home grown.” The people personally know and can commit themselves to the men whom they saw mature and grow in spiritual wisdom in their midst.

According to the pattern of tribal thinking, the wiser and more courageous the person, the more concerned he is for the *well-being of his people*. This the essence of Jesus’ teaching on leadership: *“Whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave — just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many”* (Matthew 20:26-28).

Home grown leaders understand that they are representing their own spiritual kinfolk. Therefore, unlike the *positional* rule of Hellenist/Roman religious systems, men lead by *personal example* and *personal knowledge* of those for whom they’re responsible.

A continuity of responsibility unites current leadership with those who preceded them in the personal sacrifice of caring for the people of their spiritual clan.

Think about the lists of genealogies that are repeated in the Bible. Those very sections that most of us are tempted to skip over in fact broadcast an area of importance to our Father. They reveal the *intergenerational connectedness of family that is basic to tribal thinking*. One generation prepares succeeding generations to carry on responsibilities on behalf of the people as a whole.

Our God is deeply concerned with the spiritual heritage that’s passed along by one

generation to the next. Isn’t this connectedness affirmed by the prophet Malachi as he extols God’s design for marriage?

*Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are His. And why one? **Because He was seeking godly offspring.** So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth* (Malachi 2:15).

Paul, too, had an eye on future generations that they would walk steadfastly in commitment to their beloved God: *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4).

Tribal Strength Relies on the Clan

The clan was the primary support system for the Hebraic individual and family, coming alongside those who abided under the eldership of the clan leaders.

Under the authority of the clan elders, the male heads of each household exercised collective responsibility for preparing the next generation to walk as righteous men and women.

Widows and orphans came under the care of the clan elders when they had no other family to care for them.

Paul reinforced this concept of family interconnectedness that would uphold the dignity of the needy members:

*Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. But if a widow has **children or grandchildren**, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for **their own family** and so repaying their **parents and grandparents**, for this is **pleasing to God*** (1 Timothy 5:3,4).

The elders made sure that families took care of their own widows. Widows who had no families came under the care of the spiritual clan.

Everyone in the clan shared responsibility for all the children within the clan. The entire extended spiritual family of a home fellowship were involved in training succeeding godly generations. We'll discuss this further in Part 5.

Keep in mind that the clan also provides the vital link between *family* and *tribe*. Families which are in the Domestic Stage of semi-autonomy place great stress on the individual family unit. *Tribal* individuals and families, however, are more like the Trustee family. They're linked by strong allegiance to their clan, for they find much-needed support within it (see **Part 2, Appendix B**).

In Nigeria, for example, the young men call all of their uncles "father." Each older man exercises paternal responsibility to train and confront his nephews. This relational mentoring helps a younger man form the character qualities that help him to be fully responsible not only for his personal well-being but also to succeed the elders in caring for the people. The same relational responsibility applies in the interaction between older women and younger ones.

If you ask many Native Americans about themselves, they'll tell you which *clan* they belong to in their tribe. The clan is the critical relational mechanism for tribes as the home fellowship is to that which our Father is restoring to us today.

Today's *spiritual clan* equivalent, the home fellowship, carries the same function as the clan. Sadly for Christianity, this much-needed relational tier was eliminated when the Hellenist philosophers entered the church. Spurred on by the prevailing Roman organizational hierarchy of government, Christendom lost the relational connectedness that individuals and families had so enjoyed as extended spiritual family.

As we mentioned earlier: In place of the intimacy of bearing one another's load, Christianity adopted the pagan temple worship format of their conquerors. They "boxed" God into the framework of reli-

gious services and programs which were far removed from the inter-relational pattern of daily life.

Home Fellowships: The Vital "Spiritual Clan" Linking Family and Congregation

Several of Paul's epistles mention faith communities within the personal, interactive framework of the home setting.

*"Greet also the church that meets **at their house**" (Romans 16:5).*

*"The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the church that meets **at their house**" (1 Corinthians 16:19).*

*"To Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets **in your home**" (Philemon 2).*

*"Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church **in her house**" (Colossians 4:15).*

Note that the practice of meeting in homes as a fellowship of Jesus-followers was widespread, stretching from Rome to Greece to Asia Minor. Content to be known as His "called-out" ones, they were identified by their fellowship locale: at *whose house* did they meet as brothers and sisters in Jesus?

24/7 Commitment to One Another

The home fellowship of the early church was a *seven-day-a-week relational commitment* to fulfill our Father's goals and objectives as His beloved called-out people.

[In Part 4 we'll continue discussion of God's goals and objectives for His people in home fellowships.]

What a contrast to congregational "home groups" that have contact only through weekly or even monthly *scheduled*

meetings. Compare this with the tribal-based understanding of the Hebraic home fellowship: a caring commitment for one another shown through many *unscheduled* contacts with each other all during the week, as well as corporate times of sharing, worship and prayer. Followers of Jesus who gather together in each other's homes are "*extended family*", spiritual relatives who are deeply committed to:

- Jesus as the Lord of their lives
- caring for each other as family in Him
- fulfilling our Lord's Kingdom goals and objectives individually and collectively as His instruments of righteousness.

Many Christians today don't realize that long before the coming of Jesus, God had been nurturing *relational commitment* as the Hebraic Stream of Judaism used their homes to encourage one another to serve and obey God. In fact, all of the church practices seen in the Newer Testament were already part of the faith enactment of the Hebraic Stream of Judaism before the coming of Jesus.

God had been preparing the faith practices of His Church for centuries before Jesus was incarnate. All that was needed to fulfill their faith walk was the long-anticipated Messiah and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit.

[For more on the differences between the Hebraic Stream of Judaism and the Judaizing Stream, see *Discussing How to Restore the Early Church*, Lesson 8.]

A few verses after Peter's Pentecost message we're given a glimpse of some practices of the earliest Church that had carried over from their walk as Hebrew followers of the one true God of Scripture:

They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:46,47).

The earliest followers of Jesus were so accustomed to sharing their lives as *family* because that was the pattern of the God-loving, commandment-keeping descendants of Abraham from before the time of Christ.

The early Hebraic home gatherings were characterized by *personal participation*. These men and women came *prepared to share* the bounty of that which the Spirit had been doing in their lives throughout the week. These were times of exuberant worship and testimony — a time for family to be edified by one another.

When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church (1 Corinthians 14:26).

A home fellowship was also a wellspring of support for married couples, families, singles, and widows. The earliest followers of Jesus understood that marriages could not make it on their own. (Tragically, so many couples today quit their covenant because they have no one to come alongside them with the loving wisdom of experience.) It was within the spiritual clan that older people could help couples while their problems were still bite-size.

Personal dignity was upheld as people genuinely cared for each other as *brothers and sisters*. This sense of intimacy is why Paul could so freely address fellow followers of Jesus in such endearing terms. John patterns these close-knit relationships in his epistle references to his *beloved children* and *dear friends*.

Another intergenerational facet is evident from Scripture. Hebraic people *treasured children* as gifts from God. The home signified the spiritual training base for the Jewish family, the place where parents shouldered the responsibility for training up their children in the wisdom and will of the Lord. In this endeavor they were supported by their home fellowship family.

The extended spiritual family with its *intergenerational communal responsibility* supported the home as the primary building block for training the next generation. Paul reinforces this frame of reference repeatedly for Gentile believers who may not have been familiar with the Hebraic sense of *belonging to one another relationally* through their trust in the one true God.

How Can We Regain What Our Spiritual Ancestors Had? *First, Your Home Must Be The Basic Building Block For Spiritual Development*

Preparing the next generation to be our spiritual successors is critical if you yearn to follow our Father's commands. As you read the passage below, note the strong emphasis by our God that *each generation* ensure that succeeding ones follow in His way.

These are the commands, decrees and laws the Lord your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the Lord your God as long as you live by keeping all His decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life.

Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the Lord, the God of your fathers, promised you. Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:1-9).

These oft-quoted verses call for *consistent, intentional interaction* between parents and their children each and every day. A few "quality-time" moments before bedtime are insufficient in God's sight. Even if you must drastically alter your current time commitments to parent your children, the benefits will astonish you!

Testify *daily* among your family in what ways you've seen Him at work in your character, your relationships, your decisions, your Scripture study and your prayer life. Then your children will learn that our Lord is part of *every aspect of their lives* — every decision, every relationship, every opportunity — not just "church activities". God doesn't live under the steeple!

One of our Hebraic ancestors reinforced the importance of a spiritual heritage that continues for a thousand generations of those who fear the Lord and love Him:

We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation the praiseworthy deeds of the Lord, His power, and the wonders He has done. He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel, which He commanded our forefathers to teach their children, so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born, and they in turn would tell their children. Then they would put their trust in God and would not forget His deeds but would keep His commands" (Psalm 78:4-7).

Are not the above passages, along with a host of others, the basis for Paul to exhort fathers to fulfill their responsibility to the next generation? "Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord" (Ephesians 6:4).

Even if you haven't been diligent thus far, go to each of your children (adult ones included!) and ask their forgiveness for not having been the parent that God wanted you to be. Then ask them to let you into their lives to start walking in righteous parenting!

Intergenerational awareness and responsibility are threaded throughout the Bible. Examples abound in Proverbs. *Why* are grandchildren the “crown” of their grandparents? *“Children’s children are a crown to the aged, and parents are the pride of their children”* (Proverbs 17:6). What changes must you make in your life to be a crown for your grandchildren, or the pride of your children, even if they’re grown?

Other than the few in the United States who are obsessed with their genealogy, most westerners are unable to trace their ancestral heritage back more than three or four generations. This lack of heritage awareness is a blind spot for many of us. God’s commands are for *all generations*, and each generation must be diligent in training the next.

The generation of Americans born in the mid-1900’s for the most part experienced frequent contact among grandparents, grandchildren, aunts, uncles and cousins as they were growing up. Such a reality today seems as remote as black-and-white TV. To our culture’s detriment we have lost access to the wisdom and solidity and reliability of people who really cared that we succeed and uphold the family name and traditions. Our culture has lost both the *respect and the need* for the wisdom of elders.

Important Thoughts to Consider:

1. The virtues of Christ-like character are learned in the crucible of your home. *How* you as parents live in service to your King is more important than what you say. You are the first picture of living for Jesus that your child observes. That first impression will ultimately affect your children’s concept of themselves as adult followers of Jesus.

2. Unlike religious systems in which children are outsourced to others for spiritual development, and government systems of compulsory education for academic and/or

vocational training, our Father established home fellowships to support your home in raising your children. Coming alongside to undergird parents, the extended spiritual family of a home fellowship helps your child spiritually and vocationally become a responsible adult in service to their King.

The Hebrew word *avodah* means both work and worship. A young person who has been guided into the calling God has prepared for him will work with thankfulness. A person who is grateful in his workplace is better able to fulfill his King’s purpose in his being there, and to bring God glory as he works.

- **Detail how spiritual development takes place in your home. How is it supported by others outside your home?**

- **Would Jesus commend you for the earnestness of spiritual training in your home? Why or why not? Would you be embarrassed if He arrived unannounced?**

- **If you have children, list the key character qualities and motivations of each.**

- **If you have children, how is your fellowship family helping you raise your child(ren) spiritually and vocationally to serve our Lord? How is it falling short in this “clan” responsibility?**

- If you're an adult without children in your home, how are you helping the families with children in your fellowship family to raise theirs in loving service to our Father?

How Can We Regain What Our Spiritual Ancestors Had?

We Must Intergenerationally and Communally Train Successors

If you listen closely, you can almost hear the urgency in the prophet Joel's proclamation: Loving God and serving Him in obedient trust is the *communal responsibility* of all the people! The entire faith community is responsible to listen and to act.

Follow Joel in Chapter One: "**Hear this, you elders, listen all who live in the land**" (v.2a). The elders addressed here are the *zaken*s, the older respected men of wisdom who corporately rendered account to God on behalf of the entire community. Elders also represent the shepherds who "pastored" the faith communities of the early Church.

"*Has anything like this ever happened in your days or in the days of your forefathers?*" (v.2b) Without the collective memory of earlier generations who have experienced the consequences of sin and the blessings of obedient trust, the young will blindly plunge into self-gratification and lawlessness. "**Tell it to your children, and let them tell it to their children, and their children to the next generation**" (v.3).

The curses and consequences for disobedience that afflicted Israel came upon the *whole people*. Therefore, the responsibility to train up the succeeding generations also fell on the people as a whole community. This is a common thread among tribal societies, and this responsibility is borne by the clan as a whole.

The spiritual body of Christ *as a family* is as interconnected as was the whole of the Israelite people called to love God and to serve His purposes.

The responsibility for training up succeeding generations was primarily contained within the family and extended spiritual family of home fellowship.

In biblical times, the purpose of learning was to train up individuals *to love and to serve the Lord* their whole lives. Learning was not confined to childhood; rather, pursuit of God's truths in order to apply them to every situation in life was an endeavor for every person in the community, young and old. "*Wisdom begins with the ability to see and evaluate all of life from God's point of view*" (Proverbs 1:7). People who have journeyed longer in faithful trust have much to share with those just behind them or barely starting out on their life pilgrimage.

Dr. Ron Moseley, founder of the Arkansas Institute of Holy Land Studies, writes about the educational life stages each male passed through in biblical times. At age five, the youngster was ready to begin actual study of the Hebrew Scriptures with other young boys. By age ten he was ready to explore the Oral Law, which interpreted the written law into life application.

By thirteen, armed with knowledge of God's Word and the means to apply it, he was ready for his *bar mitzvah* and the inherent responsibility of following God's commands. In other words, at that point the young man needed to approach God himself to discern His will and apply it.

At the age of fifteen he was ready to study the writings of the wise sages who had passed along wisdom in times past, and at age eighteen he was ready for marriage. (Given the self-focused, individualist mentality of today and the disconnectedness from relationships that would commit to helping a marriage covenant succeed, few eighteen-year-olds whom we know are ready for this step!)

At the age of twenty, the well-trained young man was prepared to seek a vocation. At age thirty he was mature enough to pursue spiritual responsibilities that benefited others, even while engaged in his occupation. At least by then, people felt he had something worthwhile to say! At age forty, the maturing man was considered to have adequate understanding of God and righteousness and justice.

However, it wasn't until *age fifty* that both men and women were regarded as having the wisdom and experience to counsel others.

[See Chapter 3, A Hebraic Perspective: The Foundational Thinking of the Early Church in our book *Restoring the Early Church for more on the stages of manhood.*]

Access to intergenerational contact, load-bearing and personal connectedness are so vital to families today. Each person is at a different stage of decision and of progress in his pilgrimage with Jesus. Role models who come alongside those in their spiritual family bring fresh insight, encouragement, and course redirection if need be.

Our Father intended that His people be those who *understand*, who are able to discern His commands and obey them *wisely*. One of our Father's purposes for His children to know and apply His Word is that others would take notice.

Observe them carefully, for this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations, who will hear about all these decrees and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people' (Deuteronomy 4:6).

This is what the world needs to see from the followers of Jesus today! Those who have sought their Lord's counsel and applied it throughout their lives are a repository of encouragement to the next generation. As Job declared, "*Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding? To God belong wisdom and power; counsel and understanding are His*" (12:12,13).

While an old axiom states that there's no fool like an old fool, those in the faith community who have *learned from their mistakes* are invaluable resources because they've experienced the compassion of our Father's forgiveness and His power to press on, as did Paul, without mourning the past.

Creativity in bringing joy to children as they learn God's Word is an effective means of instilling a reverence and a delight in God's Word. Having a number of people involved in this responsibility enhances the probability that little ones will stay interested and retain what you've taught.

Why should it matter to you if someone is prepared to replace you in the faith when you're gone? One reality affects all families: Everyone dies at some point. As our society has moved off the farm, *succession*, or who will serve in place of another, has been forgotten. Except for those in some family-owned businesses, few of us think about succession. But God wants His people to be diligent about the spiritual inheritance we leave to succeeding generations!

[See the August 2002 Newsletter, "*Covenant Communities*".]

Again, a *tribal view* of spiritual heritage emphasizes that each family and faith community face two crucial questions:

- Who will *succeed* them in the faith?
- How well are potential successors being *trained to lead*?

Moses understood the importance of *succession*. For many years he personally trained Joshua to succeed him. At last, the succession was complete when Moses passed on the mantle of leadership to the younger man in front of the whole nation. When the elderly prophet died, his successor had already been prepared to be the new leader:

Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, 'Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must

divide it among them as their inheritance'
(Deuteronomy 31:7).

Elders: Older Men Responsible to Our Father for Ensuring Godly Successors

When you think about preparing the next generation, you probably focus on the children. But our Father focuses on the ones He ultimately holds responsible for ensuring that successors are biblically trained: the elders.

[See Chapter 4. *Shepherding by Elders*, in our book *Pastoring by Elders*, and Segments 7 thru 10 of the Home Fellowship portion of our *Jesus In Your Home* video series for more on succession.]

If you recall, an Israelite belonged to a *family* which was part of a *clan* which was part of a *tribe* which was part of the *nation* of Israel. Responsible leadership at each level was provided by the appropriate elders. Men who showed exceptional leadership qualities as elders of their families were recognized and promoted for the good of the people. They became elders over clans, then tribes, and ultimately the nation.

This same leadership progression was true for the earliest Church. As an extension of the home, the home fellowship of Jesus followers were committed to one another's growth in Christ's likeness as extended spiritual family. Qualified older men served with authority and leadership in the lives of others. This is why Peter could command young believers to *submit* to those who are older (see 1 Peter 5:5).

In the fellowship family that gathered together in homes, elders personally cared for each individual even as they had cared for members of their immediate family. [This is analogous to the Trustee Family in **Appendix B of Part 2.**]

An elder or shepherd was a gray-haired man of compassion and leadership who imparted wisdom and counsel to a specific group of people. As we noted, the Hebrew word for elder, *zaken* (zah-ken'), connoted men who had proved themselves worth following and emulating. The role of elder was

a life's goal to which men who sought wisdom aspired.

Zaken, by definition, means "gray-bearded," and suggests wisdom gained by many years of life experience. Over the course of their lives these men exhibited servant-like character qualities that took into consideration the welfare of others within their family, clan, and tribe.

Because the nation of Israel saw itself as a singular "extended family," each body of elders possessed an inherent interest in the directions and decisions that were made. Their *own kin* would be affected.

The Lord ensured that this role would be an integral part of preparing His children to walk in spiritual maturity: "***It was He*** who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be ***shepherds and teachers***, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the ***body of Christ may be built up***" (Ephesians 4:11,12). All of these anointings were already in place among the Jewish people before the new covenant was initiated.

The Greek word *poimen* (poy-mane), translated as "shepherd", is a far cry from the modern concept of pastor. Today's hired clergy administrates, counsels, visits, and generally fills in for every need that is supposed to be fulfilled by the body instead.

However, *poimen* was understood to be the equivalent of the Hebrew role of elder. Older men of wisdom represented the Father's loving concern for His children.

[See Chapter 2. *Nicolaitanism, Repression of God's People*, in our book *Pastoring by Elders* for more on this subject.]

Walking in the role of an elder within a home gathering setting allowed these older men to edify the body through accessibility and wise counsel. It was within the context of *committed loadbearing* that the relational responsibility of Hebrews 13:17 was worked out:

Obey [literally, let yourself be persuaded by] the ones leading you and submit. They keep watch on behalf of your souls as men

who must [in the future] **render an account**. Obey them so that their work will **be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.**

Elders will render account to our Father for *each person* for whom they are spiritually responsible. That's why the size of a fellowship family that's gathered in a home must be limited to the elder(s)' ability to render account to our Father.

Biblical elders *pastored* (instructed, nurtured, confronted, trained) the men of the faith community, who then "pastored" their own families. An elder must lead through *personal example* in the way he walks his own relationship with Jesus. He also needs *personal knowledge* of the believers he's leading, including awareness of the spiritual gifting of each person to help each one fulfill God's particular purposes for the fellowship as a whole. [See *God's Instruments For War* for discussion on spiritual giftings.]

When you're in committed relationship with brothers and sisters in Jesus, you need to consider how you can make the work of those elders a joy, or else your presence in a home fellowship is "of no advantage" to them.

- **Ask yourself: "Am I a burden or a burden-lifter in my faith community?" How is the Spirit prompting you to help fulfill our Father's purposes among your extended spiritual family?**

Elders of Home Fellowships Lead Through Example

God has created men and women to process information in very different ways. Anyone can be taught data that will add to his knowledge but do little to alter his character, his life choices or world view. Numerous studies have revealed that males are *changed* not by what they hear or read but by two interpersonal means:

- 1) **Personal interaction with role models**
- 2) **Personal confrontation by older, wiser men.**

Education only adds to a man's knowledge. He's *not changed* by what he knows, Rather, knowledge only tends to puff up his ego.

Women, on the other hand, are *changed* by role modeling, education (such as what they read or hear), and, to a lesser extent, by confrontation.

Within the Christian community at large today, *education* is the most commonly used form of passing along information. Think about all those sermons and Sunday school classes you've sat through! The education format has made it difficult to nurture and develop mature men who will be capable of succeeding the older men in the body.

How did *education* rather than role modeling and confrontation become the pre-eminent method of discipleship in the church? The converted Hellenist philosophers who entered the church after the first century introduced an emphasis on *academic pursuit and knowledge acquisition*. Since character development and the character and life experience of the teacher himself were considered unimportant, imparting character qualities was minimized.

This is why many "teachers" in today's Hellenist-influenced religious system rely on prepared study guides in order to convey content. Scriptural search for answers to *relevant problems* of people in the faith community seems odd to most leaders. The impact of a Christlike lifestyle which is role modeled through personal relationship *outside* the classroom environment (even such as getting together for early breakfast and discussion) is practically nonexistent.

We visited a congregation of about forty who were meeting in a school classroom. As we entered the room we noticed that few people were sitting together. Most were scattered in their own small row around the room. Except for a small worship team and the pastor, little participation was evident.

Since we had just met the pastor, we got together with him and his wife to share some of the Hebraic concepts of applying the Word to life situations. In that way awareness of our Lord could be continued outside the meeting place walls. We also encouraged him to invite the congregation closer to the front so they could be near each other.

The next Sunday he took the leap. Encouraging the people to move up and to chat with each other briefly, he then read briefly from Scripture. Pausing, he scanned the congregation and started asking them questions about the passage and how it might apply to their own lives. Hesitant at first, the gathering quickly erupted into enthusiastic participation that extended for two hours! Even the teens and young people took part!

One couple we'd met briefly earlier had been visiting the congregation for the first time. As they came up to us the husband declared, "If this is the typical Hebraic teaching style, let's have more of it! This is *great!*" People lingered long afterward to talk. Invitations to get together were extended. What a change!

During the week, however, the pastor must have been talking to other clergy in the community. Feeling that he'd lost control over the people, he was threatened. He sent us a letter stating in no uncertain terms that he didn't want *his* church turning into a *synagogue!* The next week we were told that the "old" format was once again in place. He preached and the people sat there uninvolved. Not too many weeks later the congregation dissolved and the pastor found himself selling insurance for a living.

Biblical Hebraic teaching can be summed up by this: "Do as I do." The Hebrews recognized that the only valid form of learning was that which could and would be applied to life. To see this concept become reality calls for wise, older role models: elders. Through role modeling, instruction and confrontation, elders help younger

followers of Jesus walk with increasing wisdom as they *apply* what has been shared.

How important the criterion of *intimate relational care* was in determining leadership in the early Church! Even forthright Paul could remind the believers in Thessalonica that his conduct among them had been as intimate as that of a mother or father.

The *way a man lived*, not his head knowledge, reflected his true measure. The writer to the Hebrews reaffirmed this critical link between "talk" and "walk". Elders lead by example. What they want to reproduce in others must be seen in their own lives:

Remember the ones leading you, who spoke the word of God to you. Consider the result of their conduct and imitate their faith. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever (Hebrews 13:7,8).

Since elders are the undershepherds of Jesus (see 1 Peter 5:4), and Jesus is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the same qualities of caring and attentive leadership should be expected in any era or culture. Our Father loves you too much to allow you to remain unchallenged in your sin. So, too, are biblical elders compelled by the Spirit to confront those in the fold who are straying from the Lord.

Confrontation can run a gamut from mild chiding to strong rebuke. Appropriate confrontation by an older man who has intimate knowledge of a disciple is vital because it can incite a younger man to change his course:

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. Treat them with the highest regard and love because of the work they are doing. Live at peace among yourselves (1 Thessalonians 5:12,13, Jewish New Testament).

Some might call confrontation "tough love". Others recognize it as fatherly concern that clearly exposes foolishness and sin while pointing the way to wisdom and

righteousness. Unconfronted irresponsibility only adds to the burden of others.

The Role of Older Women

While older men of wisdom served as elders within their faith communities, older women played an important role among early believers as well. The biblical precedent for a righteous woman of virtue to influence others is found in Proverbs 31:10-31. This passage was recited every Sabbath in the homes of both Jews and Jewish followers of Jesus to affirm a wife as a vital part of a man's reason for existence. A husband's admiring recitation also elevated her in their children's eyes.

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. Younger women could receive counsel from her, and could be helped to grow in that Godly pattern.

A contemporary insidious scheme of Satan sets a snare of immorality in the path of vulnerable younger men who might want to come alongside women to counsel them in their distress. To forestall temptation, the apostle Paul wisely instructed *women* to guide other women. The widows and older women of each congregation whose husbands served as elders were perhaps the likeliest candidates to fulfill this assignment:

*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).*

The Greek word for "self-controlled" used in verse 5 means "to be sober-minded, or to voluntarily place limitations on their own freedom." A woman herself makes a deliberate choice to submit to God's order in her household. An older woman can reinforce

and encourage a younger woman's decision to follow this decidedly counter-cultural path.

If the biblical pattern that was designed to discourage sinful choices were followed today, how many adulterous affairs between clergy and vulnerable, discontented women could be avoided? Even within fellowships that are extended spiritual family, keep in mind that this culture, and the media in particular, exalt lifestyles and role models that are incompatible with righteousness.

Be aware of other demonic ploys within segments of "Christian" teaching. Rationalizing destructive behavior that stomps on the Bible under the deception that "God wants me to be happy" crushes your children's faith and disheartens your faith community family. How great is the need for older women in your home fellowship family to come alongside younger women to point out potential pitfalls and encourage them in righteous living!

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 obedient trust as a lifestyle.

The home fellowship family, as an extension of the home, provides this type of support and access. Granted, some of that contact may have to be in the form of e-mail or phone calls from the workplace during breaks. But the accountability that comes from knowing someone will be impacted for good or for evil by your choices may just tip the balance toward walking as Jesus would!

Today's pattern of discontented women who tear down their husbands and families through phone calls or bad reports disguised as prayer requests is a sad reflection of worldly infiltration into the church. If you are an older woman, you need to step forward as a responsible voice. Nip the self-

destructive trend that isolates women from *pressing on together* to fulfill our Lord's purposes.

This requires deliberate choices on both your part and that of the younger women to be accessible and willing to initiate contact, particularly with women who are fearful to commit to accountability or a deeper relationship of obedient trust in Jesus. Are *you* willing to ask our Father to reveal the particular woman or women with whom He wants your life to be intertwined?

Summary of Part 3

Hebraic home fellowships were an integral part of extending the Kingdom of God. They came about as individuals and families intentionally lived in love and fear of God, and responded to His Word through their choices and actions. In this manner home fellowships multiplied throughout neighborhoods because the changes that God was making in believers' lives were so evident, and their love for one another was so obvious. Kingdom expansion resulted as the Gospel was proclaimed through Spirit-transformed family in Jesus.

The relationally intimate gatherings in homes branched out into a *corporate sense of connection* with other Jesus-followers within their town or city. Evangelists and merchants who were followers of Jesus journeyed to other towns and even nations. They carried with them their *identificational connectedness* with those back home as well as with new family members in Jesus they encountered along the way.

If you're ever going to experience the love, understanding, and acceptance that God is restoring to His people, you must, by His grace, leave behind the *depersonalized* Hellenist forms of associations to which you may have grown accustomed.

You can't expect God to work mightily in your life if you're complacent in your relationship with Him and content to sit in religious services and programs as your only (or chief) expression of that relationship.

You may need several months to purposefully press on before you're authentically walking in the increased personal responsibilities of a home fellowship family that's committed to extending the Kingdom.

- **When you hear the word "church", what goes through your mind?**

- **Since the true meaning of "church" is "the called-out ones", how does that understanding change your view of yourself and your relational responsibilities to our Lord and to those you fellowship with?**

- **Describe in your own words your understanding of the tribal nature of Christianity.**

- **As you understand the relational nature of "tribal" Christianity, what do you need to change in your own life and faith practice?**

- **Have you ever been in a home fellowship which had a 24/7 commitment to each other? If not, do you feel you could be part of one? Are there changes in your faith practices and priorities you would have to make? Describe them.**
