

Cyber Truths By E-mail

31. Shepherding A Fellowship Family (October 24, 2007)



Restoration Ministries International

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Dear Friends,

We prepared this teaching e-mail because of recent events that have occurred not only in our own home fellowship family but also as a result of communication with other home fellowships. We hope you'll discuss and apply this e-mail with those with whom you seek to share biblical fellowship.

Sadly some of you have been impeding your own spiritual life as well as our King's purposes by striving for fellowship on the wrong footing. You may have already planted seeds that will ultimately end in destruction of that which you're hoping to grow. We hope this Teaching E-mail will help you reconsider the purposes and methodologies of the fellowship family you're longing to experience.

On our website are many teaching materials concerning home fellowships, so we'll be citing those rather than exhaustively covering this topic again.

Some Insight Into Our Own Home Fellowship Family

This past weekend the men and boys of our home fellowship family went fishing along the Arkansas River. (The women had a wonderful day of biking and hiking on their own!) At the river we split into two groups. My 15-year-old spiritual grandson, Lorenzo, tagged along with me. As we paused for a moment to talk, he told me, "Grandpa, you and Grandma are like Abraham and Sarah in the Bible to us." With tears I gave him a big hug.

One of the most important verses about Abraham for me is Genesis 18:19:

For I have chosen [Abraham], so that he will direct his children and his household after him to keep the way of the

LORD by doing what is right and just, so that the LORD will bring about for Abraham what He has promised him" (Genesis 18:19).

As a shepherd of our Father's children I take this charge very seriously — helping my spiritual family to **keep the way of the LORD**. Having shepherded a literal flock of sheep at our farm/retreat center many years ago, I understand how purposeful a shepherd must be in caring for a flock. In fact, one key facet of a shepherd's role is to help provide "**purposeful direction**" for those in the fellowship family.

When I sit down at a meal with others, I use the opportunity of eating together to provide purposeful direction through *mutual discussion*. Biblical accounts of mealtimes of our Lord Jesus and our early forefathers in the faith reveal purposeful discussion times as they ate.

Lorenzo's parents, Leo and Lillie Mann, and his brothers Lucas (12) and Jacob (7) moved to Colorado Springs from Arizona about five weeks ago. We had maintained contact with them for several years as they applied the Hebraic foundations to their family life. Now they were part of our home fellowship family and I was eldering them in person.

Two weeks after the Manns' arrival Sue and I left for a three-week trip. Before our departure I used our Sabbath gathering to give counsel to our fellowship family. I'd like to review this counsel with you and the biblical basis for it.

First, I wanted to help them understand my role in their lives if I was to be used by the Spirit to guide and nurture them in Christ. A shepherd's responsibilities to our Father needs to be made clear so that those in his care can understand

their own responsibilities as willing learners. (This principle also applies to husbands and fathers. If your wife and children don't clearly recognize your biblical responsibilities, how can they support you as you fulfill them on their behalf?)

A key verse describes the interactive role of both shepherd and sheep. Note that the word commonly translated "obey" contains the deeper meaning of *voluntarily listening* with the confidence that the counsel shared is worth hearing and heeding:

Fully listen to the ones leading you, with the intent of submitting to them. They keep watch on behalf of your souls as men who will give an account. Confidently let yourselves be persuaded so that they may do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be profitless to you" (Hebrews 13:17, paraphrase from the Greek).

As one who elders, I render account to my Father for each and every person in our fellowship family. That's why we make sure we don't grow larger than the number of people I can personally render account to my Father for unless He raises up another elder in our midst to serve as well. If the number exceeds that which I'm able and available to serve, we multiply into two home fellowship families.

Note that those an elder serves are responsible to make it a joy for him as he nurtures and guides them. If they don't, their participation in their fellowship family will avail nothing in their spiritual maturation.

A Reminder About Authority

The word "authority" is commonly used, but do you know what it means? As it pertains to a man and his home, or to a shepherd and the flock he serves,

biblical authority can be defined as the privilege and responsibility to:

- **include** those people or things that contribute to peace and harmony in the home or fellowship family, or **exclude** those people or things that rob the home or fellowship family of peace and harmony;
- to **commend** those actions and attitudes that contribute to the peace and harmony of the home or fellowship family, or to **correct** those actions and attitudes that rob the peace and harmony of the home or fellowship family.

This is why Paul directs those in a fellowship family "to respect those who are working hard among you, those who are guiding you in the Lord and confronting you in order to help you change" (1 Thessalonians 5:12).

The person who serves in authority is like a gatekeeper. He **includes** and **commends** those people and things that support his responsibilities to God on behalf of the faith family, and **excludes** or **corrects** those that don't.

The Hebrew word for peace and wholeness is *shalom*. The letters of that word mean "authority that keeps chaos in check."

If those within the gates of your home or fellowship family are to be filled with *shalom*, the well-being and peace that each person needs, then anything that would disrupt that peace must be confronted and/or eliminated.

By the work of the Spirit in him shepherds must have such love for our Lord and His righteous standards as



to readily confront, correct and/or exclude as necessary for the well-being of the fellowship family (see Proverbs 15:31; Colossians 3:16).

By correcting or excluding someone, you're *not* rejecting the person but attempting to help him or her change their unrighteous behavior or attitude. If they refuse to change that which is unrighteous by God's Word, then they need to be excluded from fellowship until they respond to the Spirit in repentance.

Recall from scriptural example that our Father will **not accept excuses** from His elder/shepherds when we fail to fulfill our responsibilities. And He won't allow those who serve in authority **to blame the ones in their care** when they themselves have failed. Just as fathers who duck biblical responsibility rob their home of peace by perpetuating distrust and apprehension, so do negligent elders.

If you are called to shepherd our Father's children and you fear correcting or excluding those who need it, then *don't be a shepherd!* You'll only breed rebellion.

In order for our home fellowship family to better understand my role of eldering, I asked them to watch "*Sands of Iwo Jima*". This film vividly depicts a Marine drill instructor who trains his men for battle, then leads them against the enemy.

As Sue and I recently took a walk with the Manns, they identified me with the drill instructor in the movie in a positive way. This makes my service as shepherd to provide **purposeful direction** that much easier.

Think for a moment how Jesus trained His disciples — a combination of *role modeling, teaching, and confronting*. To

me this equals purposeful direction.

[For more on this topic, see **Discussing How To Restore The Early Church**, Section 5 — Lessons 34, 36, 38, 44; also, the WWII movie *12 O'Clock High* is another good source of understanding purposeful direction.]

Growing The Relationships In Your Fellowship Through Confrontation

Before Sue and I left on our trip I made clear to our fellowship family the importance of both *not holding on* to ill feelings toward each other as well as *confronting anything* that produces apprehension. In other words, they were to *call time out* when ill feelings or apprehension arose by using their hands to make a "T". In this manner, further discussion or clarification could take place before apprehensive thoughts or feelings festered.



It was very important for me to share with them this valuable interpersonal process. I want our fellowship family to grow in *their love for Jesus*, and through them in *His love for each other*. Confrontation enables a person to address whatever is hindering their love for others.

In fact, they used this process often in our absence, and when we returned they'd melted together even more as spiritual family!

[For more on removing apprehension, see our book, *Growing Relationships Through Confrontation*; also, Teaching E-mails: 10. *Apprehension: The Silent Destroyer* (June 25, 2005); 19. *Replacing Apprehension With Love* (December 22, 2005).]

A Reminder About Our Father's Criteria For Fellowship

No family or fellowship family can exist without someone who is serving with authority to gatekeep, nurture and guide. Our Sabbath gatherings are for our spiritual family to renew ourselves and to worship the King we love and serve. They're not a free-for-all for anyone to drop in and participate.

Whenever any of us encounters someone who expresses an interest in becoming part of our fellowship family, I and anyone else from our fellowship family, as appropriate, are glad to meet with them for as long as need be *outside the fellowship family time*. In other words, others are welcomed *as friends and acquaintances* at social events like barbecues or boccie games or whatever, but our worship gathering *as fellowship family* is for us who are family in Him.

For example, we met for three months with a couple who were earnestly seeking to encounter true fellowship. We reviewed the Hebraic foundations with them, took them through *Demolishing Strongholds* so that they themselves might walk in spiritual freedom, and discussed whatever issues they needed to address in order to be fully available to love and serve our Lord.

We've written before about our Father's criteria for *biblical fellowship* with others.

1. Your *fellowship* with others must ***spur you on to glorify our Father and Jesus*** through praise, worship, and living testimony (1 Corinthians 10:31).
2. Your *fellowship* with each other must ***spur your growth in Christ-likeness*** (see Philippians 2:12).
3. Your shared *fellowship* must ***spur you toward repentance and the narrow gate*** (Matthew 7:13; 1 Thessalonians 5:12).
4. Your *fellowship* as extended spiritual family must ***spur you to reveal Jesus to the lost*** in your daily lives (2 Corinthians 5:18,19).

Our fellowship family gathering times must provide for these vital purposes. This isn't the time to minister to unbelievers, or to help people demolish strongholds (we handle these situations as they arise during the week!). Rather, our Sabbath gathering is a time of joy and mutual building up of each other. As a shepherd who is serving our Lord by serving our fellowship family, I take great delight in seeing the spiritual progress His flock is making. Their growth in Christ's likeness makes my work that much easier!

Please remember this: Our Father holds the members of a home fellowship family ***communally responsible*** for each other. One person who is holding onto unconfessed sin hinders the prayers of all in your fellowship family. Upholding communal righteousness is a biblically mandated pre-condition for you to gather with others in fellowship!

The biblical standard of communal righteousness should be applied to four specific areas:

1. When you gather to **worship** with others (Psalm 24:3-4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
2. When you **pray** with others (1 Peter 3:12).
3. When you **study the Scripture for application** with others (Matthew

18:19-20).

4. When you **partake of the spiritual body and blood of Jesus** with others (1 Corinthians 10:16-22; 11:28-31).

In other words, these four areas of fellowship are reserved for those who are in righteous standing with our Father through obedient trust in His Son Jesus. We don't exercise any of the above privileges in Christ with those who aren't part of our fellowship family **without first discerning more about their spiritual condition.**

We don't extend biblical fellowship to the unrighteous who are out of fellowship with our Father and His Son, Jesus (see 1 John 1:3). It costs us too much in our relationship with our Lord if we excuse the unrepentant. Rather, we pray earnestly for them and offer to meet with them if they have a heart to repent. That's not *judging* them; it's discerning whether they're in fellowship with our Lord and responding to them according to their need.

What's the cost of fellowship with unrighteousness?

- Our worship goes unheard.
- Our prayers are unheard.
- Jesus will not come into our midst.
- We darken our Covenant renewal with our Father when we share communion with those who are out of fellowship with Him.

These are heavy consequences for tolerating sin in our fellowship family! So as a fellowship family, before we even begin to share in prayer, worship or communion, we ensure communal righteousness by asking that each of us searches our heart for any unconfessed sin. We won't violate God's holy boundary for righteousness in order to appease the unre-

pentant! We encourage you to seriously consider this practice for yourself, your family and your fellowship family.

Answered prayer that brings *testimonies to our Father's glory and faithfulness* is very important to us! Why would we (or you) want to forfeit this wonderful experience on behalf of anyone who craves their sin more than they do fellowship with our Lord?

[For more on the topic of home fellowships, see our book *Pastoring By Elders*; the February 2002 newsletter: *Our Father's Purpose and Criteria for Fellowship in Him*; also, *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church: Lessons 45-50*; Lifebyte 26: *Will Jesus Find Faith Within You?*; Lifebyte 35: *Thy Kingdom Come In My Life.*]

Some Final Thoughts

When I was going through Navy Officer Candidate School many years ago, we students were taken to the swimming pool for a series of tests. The drill instructor ordered the 90 of us to jump in and tread water.

After a minute or so the instructor noticed one man flailing on the bottom. Diving in, he pulled the drowning man to the side of the pool. I happened to overhear their conversation:

Drill Instructor: "What were you doing on the bottom of the pool?"

Candidate: "I was drowning, Sir!"

Drill Instructor: "Why were you drowning?"

Candidate: "I can't swim, Sir!"

Drill Instructor: "If you can't swim, why did you jump into the pool?"

Candidate: "You told me to, Sir!"

I'll come back to this in a minute.

I eventually became a Navy pilot, but that took *many* hours of ground school and *many* instructional flights before I ever soloed an airplane. And, how many *more* hours of both instruction and training flights before I could fly an aircraft in battle conditions.

“Preparation” is the key factor here. Don’t jump into starting a home fellowship and expect it to prosper without appropriate preparation. You’re not pulling together a social gathering, but a warfare unit in the Kingdom of God.

Some of you are starting home fellowships much like the man who couldn’t swim but still jumped into the pool. You’ll eventually drown, and how many will drown with you or become discouraged and disheartened over the whole experience?

A solution? *Before* you begin to fellowship, prayerfully explore and discuss with your family and with those you might fellowship with as family the different instructional materials on our website which pertain to home fellowships. At a minimum, you (and your spouse if you’re married) should have gone through these before you consider initiating a fellowship family.

Please, before you drown, discuss the lessons regarding home fellowships from *Discussing How To Restore The Early Church* or the *Jesus In Your Home* video segments. All are a free download.

Take whatever time you need to make sure everyone is equally committed to *living out* these truths before you fellowship as family together!