

THE GATHERINGS

THE PRINCIPLES

First of all, let's check some biblical ideas about the goals of getting together.

So those who welcomed his message were baptized. That day about 3,000 people were added to their number. The believers continued to devote themselves to what the apostles were teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to times of prayer. A sense of fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All the believers were united and shared everything with one another. They made it their practice to sell their possessions and goods and to distribute the proceeds to anyone who was in need. United in purpose, they went to the Temple every day, ate at each other's homes, and shared their food with glad and humble hearts. They were praising God and enjoying the good will of all the people. Every day the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved.

Acts 2:41-47

What, then, does this mean, brothers? When you gather, everyone has a psalm, teaching, revelation, other language, or interpretation. Everything must be done for upbuilding.

1 Corinthians 14:26

Therefore, my brothers, since we have confidence to enter the sanctuary by the blood of Jesus, the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain (that is, through his flesh), and since we have a great high priest over the household of God, let us continue to come near with sincere hearts in the full assurance that faith provides, because our hearts have been sprinkled clean from a guilty conscience, and our bodies have been washed with pure water. Let us continue to hold firmly to the hope that we confess without wavering, for the one who made the promise is faithful. And let us continue to consider how to motivate one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another even more as you see the day of the Lord coming nearer. For if we choose to go on sinning after we have learned the full truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but only a terrifying prospect of judgment and a raging fire that will consume the enemies of God.

Hebrews 10:19-27

These three texts reveal to us very interesting and deep information as to what were the principles that the disciples of Jerusalem and the disciples of the gentile world kept when holding their meetings.

Let's try to break it down in order, and try to see what were their goals and practices. Please look at the next page.

	CHURCH OF JERUSALEM (ACTS 2)	CHURCH OF GREECE (CORINTH)	CHURCH OF ROME (HEBREWS)
Teaching	The believers continued to devote themselves to what the apostles were teaching	When you gather, everyone has a [...] teaching	<i>[implicit]</i>
Fellowship with one another	The believers continued to devote themselves [...] to fellowship. [...] All the believers were united and shared everything with one another	When* you gather <i>*[not if you gather, denoting frequency]</i>	not neglecting to meet together, [...], but encouraging one another
Fellowship with God	The believers continued to devote themselves to [...] the breaking of bread, and to times of prayer	When you gather, everyone has a psalm, [...], revelation, other language, or interpretation	let us continue to come near with sincere hearts in the full assurance that faith provides
Edification & spiritual growth	All the believers were united [...] with glad and humble hearts	Everything must be done for upbuilding.	let us continue to consider how to motivate one another to love and good deeds
Focus on the outside	A sense of fear came over everyone, and many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. [...] United in purpose, they went to the Temple* every day <i>*The temple was not a church building, but the place for social life where they evangelized</i>	<i>[seen in context, in verses 23 to 25]</i> If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers , will they not say that ye are mad? But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: And thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.	to hold firmly to the hope that we confess
Multiplication	Every day the Lord was adding to their number those who were being saved.	<i>[see above]</i>	<i>[see above]</i>

As you can see, there were at least 6 general ideas that were kept in mind when coming together. You also see that some meetings were intimate, at home, some were broader, and even unbelievers could drop by. So there is of course freedom, there is not one single model that suits all cultures and circumstances.

THE PRACTICE

The question is now, what can you do? How can you start coming together? Let me recommend to you an adaptation I use from the three-thirds pattern developed by DMM (Disciple Multiplication Movements, or Disciple Making Movements).

	<i>First third: LOOK BACK</i>	<i>Second third: LOOK UP</i>	<i>Third third: LOOK FORWARD</i>
<i>Focus</i>	Shepherding	Teaching	Obedience
<i>How to do it</i>	<p>Everyone is requested to share or a testimony that glorifies God, or a prayer need.</p> <p>If a testimony is shared, you can praise God together, with music or words. If a need is shared, one or more brothers or sisters lay hands on the person and pray for the need. This is a good moment to exercise and train prophetic gifts, and to train one another to pray openly.</p>	<p>Everyone is requested to read a portion of Scripture. The servant (deacon, disciple-maker) presiding the meeting encourages the analysis of the text by providing background information and asking questions.</p> <p>You can ask these kind of questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - What do you think this text mean? Why? - Can you support your answer with other examples in the bible? - What does this text reveal over us/the church/Christ/God? 	<p>I would suggest to be careful with this section, since it can lead to legalism and control instead of motivation and encouragement. Disciples should learn to do right out of love for God and not peer pressure.</p> <p>Everyone is asked what they have learned through the sharing of needs, testimonies, and Bible study. After that, they are asked how they see it could be put into practice, and they can make a commitment to take action before the next meeting.</p> <p>In the next meeting, they can share if they were (un)successful in carrying out their commitment</p>

Before every meeting, at the beginning, it is very important to celebrate the Lord's table. The first time you come together, nevertheless, I would not do it yet. They first need to be born again, and if so, they need to understand the meaning of it. With that in mind, you will find another download button with a model 3/3s lesson on the topic of the Lord's Supper that you can use when you begin discipling an individual or a new group.

REMEMBER

This is a suggestion, not a law. This is a good way to start. Run your meetings like this at least 3 or 4 times, and then see if you need to make changes. How people respond to this varies from group to group, depending on their natural relationship and many other factors.

For example, sometimes people take too long sharing during the LOOK BACK section, and everyone is tired before starting to read the Bible. If that happens, you could move the first third to the end of the meeting. But on the other hand, if it is necessary to take longer time in the shepherding, you could also only do this during the first meetings.

Another possibility is to send the Bible verses by email or phone to the group, and let them study them at home. You can also suggest the studies of David Pawson from the Unlocking the Bible series (they are for free on YouTube), so that they broaden their knowledge about the background of the texts.

THE SEQUENCE OF TOPICS

It's vital to keep in mind that the needs of the disciples are the priority by which you choose the development of your meetings and lessons. Nevertheless, many times things are not plain obvious. So you can go two ways:

BY TOPICS

Specially for babies, or if you step into an already existing group that you didn't plant, go through the foundational teachings (from Hebrews 6:1-2). Those used to be the basic teachings of the early church: repentance, faithfulness, baptism in water, laying on of hands (baptism in the Spirit), resurrection of the dead, and final judgement.

You can also tackle specific needs that you see in them. Marriage, raising children, finances, character building (you could even go through each one of the fruit of the Spirit, from Galatians 5). You can also use specific topics to sow vision or challenge your group to take new steps.

BY BIBLE BOOKS

Depending on the background of your group, you can read one or two chapters per week from the gospel of Mark, for example, that portrays a clear picture of Jesus, or the book of Acts, that shows the early church life, the gospel message, the new birth, and so on.

All in all, you need to remember that babies need to reach stability before they are challenged to learn practical stuff. Stable believers need to learn practical stuff and acquire wisdom to deal with people, and the mature believers need to learn how to disciple others.

A recommended study would be Spiritual Ages, from the first Equipping page, Kingdom Culture. In the next Equipping page, called Kingdom Community, you will find a new model of gatherings that is designed to encourage your group to leave the nest and start building their own Kingdom Families.