

Why house church now, 1 of 4

Hi all,

I had been the Director of a Bible school that was part of a big church, at the time over 10,000 members. Because of my position over those 6 years on staff I was able to meet or interact with some of the 'big names' in Charismatic ministry in the US.

Additionally, some of my students graduated and began working for some of those ministries. Often they would have a crisis of faith because of the contradiction between the life and lifestyle of the 'big name' head of the ministry and the realities of working for them.

I saw the professional side of Christianity, and it wasn't always pretty. I resigned, and was invited by another ministry to help form an organization for certificate giving Bible schools that did not want to become colleges offering college degrees.

In that capacity and other titles and responsibilities I traveled the US and Canada visiting churches and Bible schools, acting as an advisor. The organization we founded for Bible schools also enabled me to get to know leaders of churches and Bible schools from several nations.

I found no matter where I traveled, no matter what nation they were in, they asked the same 3 questions: How do I grow my church or school? How do I pay for my church or school? How do I keep people from leaving my church or school?

By early 2001 I decided there had to be a better way. I started wondering how Paul did church, and why what I saw in scripture seemed so different from how we did church. Where was God moving next? Would that hold the answers I was looking for?

On February 4, 2001 I found myself about to minister in a church in the Toronto area. During the worship with my eyes wide open, the Lord was suddenly standing among the worship team looking directly at me. He was less than 10' or 3 meters away. I could see Him and the natural world in one of those moments like Elisha and his servant who saw the natural army and the angelic army at the same time. (II Kings 6:15-17)

When your spiritual eyes are opened to His realm all else fades away. Without any other greeting He just started:

"Do not look at the TV and larger media ministries to try to understand what I am doing in my body today. They have a part to play, but they are the visible-to-the-eye veneer of my body that people see. Those that are carnal and immature see the outward appearance and are impressed, thinking these are the height of ministry and where the Spirit is concentrating today. But they are mistaken."

"See what I see, many small churches and ministries investing in relationships, walking in love, pouring their lives into each other, this is where the Spirit is moving today. There is a revolution taking place in my body, a revolution of relationships and discipleship and love. This will affect whole communities and economies."

"See what I see, many churches all over the world in which people are accountable to one another, working through conflicts, walking in love and growing as my disciples. This is where the Spirit is moving today."

"See what I see. Many (people) running to and fro to this meeting and that, seeking the spectacular thinking that is supernatural. They are asking, 'Where is the next move, what is the next season of the Spirit?', and I say to you it is under their very noses. For the process of discipleship IS supernatural. They stumble at the supernatural work in their midst, even in their own hearts, and refuse to humble themselves and be taught, because they seek the sensational and that which appeals to the outward man. They fail to recognize the true move of God because it must be spiritually discerned."

He continued: "...you will see this revolution continue to grow and even be recognized by many, but not as a fad or a 'flashy' move of the Spirit. The discerning will perceive in their spirits that this is an abiding move; As it has been from the beginning so it must be now, I'm moving in relationships."

"This will be a time of separation within my body. This is the most important point I'm sharing with you today; the true disciples are losing their taste for the shallow and the carnal, and separating themselves from those caught up in the appearance of spirituality. These are my army, the ones no one knows, these are the ones I am raising up, not to be known of man, but to be known of God."

"You are part of this move. This move is not a move of the masses, but of the individual. Make disciples, teach the ways of the Spirit, for many are hungry to truly know me, and the Father. Lead them into intimacy and growth in Me. Hear what the Spirit is saying to the church."

As you can imagine,

This visitation in February 2001 changed everything for me. When He said the most important point was many disciples were separating themselves from the carnal to seek the true, that was my cue to focus on the true and abiding ways of the Father. He's moving in relationships...people separating themselves from the carnal expression of so many 'churches'. What did it mean?

Once I got home from that weekend of ministry I started studying and thinking through all He said. I researched church history and also how God was moving around the world today.

The revelation that the writers of the New Testament did church in the home, writing to people who did church in the home, hit me so hard I was horrified at myself. When I saw in the gospels how most of Jesus' ministry and miracles were in homes, it drove the point home. I repented more on that point than I think any other thing except for my salvation.

For my whole time of walking with the Father at that point, about 25 years, I had pulled God's Word out of the home and tried to make it fit into an auditorium! I was so deeply saddened.

By October 2001 I told Barb that I didn't want to pastor a church again

But if I did, it would be from our living room like Paul did it. Famous last words, as they say, lol.

Three weeks later, November 4, 2001, I was in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, ministering at a Sunday night service, when suddenly the Lord was standing among the worship team, just as He had done on February 4, exactly 9 months earlier. The irony of 9 months being the gestation period before birth didn't hit me until later, for I saw those 9 months of study and contemplation was exactly a gestation period. He was about to birth something out of me.

"I love these kinds of people" He said as He walked towards me. The church focused on the homeless, the former convicts, street people, addicts. Those who had failed and turned to His grace. Without further comment He continued walking, just 3 or 4 more steps to me:

"You've learned much from your studies and the people I've brought across your path the past few months."

The power was 'turned up' for lack of a better term and my strength left me as I fell to my knees. I usually fall to my knees anyway when I see Him, but with His power making my earth-body so weak in this visitation, it just happened. The pastor next to me on my left fell face forward, face down on the floor, apparently in a trance or otherwise unconscious.

"You've been doing the work of an apostle, but now I'm laying hands on you as an apostle for this task (as He laid both His hands on my head): I want you to start a house church and house church network; (and) structure it in such a way to facilitate the development of house churches around the world."

When I asked why, He responded: "It's against a time to come. Be a resource for them, for its against a time to come." I asked if He had a name in mind and He said: "The Church Without Walls International. You may start at will. I'll make sure you have all the resources you need." And other words that remain between us.

Next week, why the early church met in homes and what it means for today. Until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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Starting 2024, Why house churches. Context. 2 of 4

Hi all,

When the Lord created Adam and Eve in the Garden, He established the home as the primary place to learn about, know, and walk with God. It is the place to see how Christ (husband) and the church (wife) interact, treat each other, and depend on the Father God in their lives.

This is why Paul wrote in Ephesians 5:21-33 of this very thing, concluding in v32: "This is a great mystery; I am speaking of Christ and the church." That's His intent, the best-case scenario.

Revelation depends on family life

In Genesis 18:17-19 the Lord and 2 angels had dinner with Abraham. This is known as a 'theophany'. When Christ materialized temporarily in the Old Testament in various situations (and 2 angels in this case) to take part in natural things, like the meal they ate with Abraham.

The Lord pauses and we are given insight into His thoughts: "Shall I hide from Abraham what I'm about to do, seeing that he will become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth will be blessed because of him? I know him, that he will raise his children and household in the ways of the Lord..."

This provides another revelation, that God ties the quality of the family life to revelation He gives into the earth. He based sharing the information that He was going to destroy Sodom on the quality of Abraham's family life.

God's plans for the family

Furthermore, the revelation of His plans allowed Abraham to intercede for the city. Remember that Lot, Abraham's nephew, and his family, lived in Sodom. The Lord knew all this when He tied Abraham's family life to revealing His plans for the city. So the revelation within the family concerns first and foremost, God's plans for that family.

If you want more revelation from the Lord for your family, then focus on your home life. Be that husband and/or father in Christ you need to be. Be that wife and/or mother you need to be. The Lord will reveal His plans for that family to that family, within that family. Don't think (mom or dad) you have to go to church to 'get a word' for your family. It starts in the home.

If single, be who you need to be in Christ to your family, friends, neighbors and co-workers. Revelation for the purpose of intercession will come from the Lord for those groups in your life.

Get rid of stinking thinking

If you have thought church meetings are the primary way to learn what God is doing today, that is wrong. When you flow with Him in the original divine order, life falls into place. Things happen, but there is a grace to meet each challenge.

Revelation flows outward from the individual and family to the world. Apostles and prophets according to Ephesians 3:1-11 DO have revelation about Christ in us and things related to our salvation. Yes. But that scripture says their revelation has to do with what we have in Christ.

In the family, God's revelation will be about His plans for each member first, then outward to His larger plans in the earth. It makes the family as the primary 'intercessory prayer team' in the earth.

Flash forward to 150 years before Jesus' ministry in the gospels.

The Greeks have invaded Israel and Jewish leaders realize they are being overrun with worldly influence. God's emphasis was on each family learning the things of God, so He only commanded they come to the temple in Jerusalem 3x a year. (Deuteronomy 16:16, Ex 23:17, 1 Kings 9:25)

They only had to go to temple 3x in a year because God focused on His knowledge flowing in and through each family. Amazing how backwards we have it in church auditorium culture. We now emphasize going to 'church' 1-3x a week, giving our children to strangers to teach them about God. How backwards from the original intent! The Lord commanded daily revelation and talk of Him in the home, supplemented only 3x a year with a big assembly in the temple.

The problem with that plan is that if families fail, the knowledge of God doesn't flow into the earth. And in this case, the families of Israel were failing, heavily influenced by Greek emphasis on sports, fashion, art, theater, and working out at gymnasiums. How could they keep the next generation in the ways of the Lord when there are all those outside influences?

Around the time of the Maccabee's (when the miracle of Hanukkah happened)

There was a revival trying to reclaim Jewish ways. A group known as the 'separated ones' decided families should meet in homes each Sabbath (Saturday), with a minimum of 10 families comprising each 'gathering'. The 'separated ones' would copy the OT and travel to these home gatherings.

These separated ones also decided a person could walk on the Sabbath up to about 1/4 mile (.5km) before walking became work. It meant these Saturday gatherings were within each family's radius of 1/4 mile (.5km).

Remember a 13 year old boy was counted as an adult male. So you could have as few as 2 or 3 families making up each weekly gathering. (Jesus' 4 brothers were named in Mt 13:55, so that family with 1 or 2 others with several boys could form a weekly gathering.)

These weekly 'gatherings' would become the house churches in Acts.

The word 'separated ones' is the word 'Pharisee'. The word 'gathering' is 'synagogue.' When you see Jesus in the synagogue teaching, realize those were in homes. At the most there would be the occasional abandoned home they could meet in, but much of the time synagogues or gatherings were held in homes. The building we now call a synagogue came about like the building we call church did, centuries later.

When Pentecost happened and so many people started following the apostles, it was a synagogue split. I've seen estimates there were 10,000 believers in Jerusalem, all of them meeting in homes. The Pharisees were furious that a bunch of uneducated men would break off of their 150 year old system, teaching about Jesus whom they had killed.

They didn't meet in homes because of persecution.

They were already meeting in homes under the 150 year old Pharisee's synagogue system. As the gospel spread they continued meeting in homes, for the home remains God's creation for learning of Him and seeing His life demonstrated in day to day living. It was a natural thing to gather with other living temples of God over food and talk, study and prayer, to learn about Him and what He was doing in everyone's lives.

Roman, Greek, and Hebrew culture included family and neighbors regularly getting together for meals, sharing what was happening in their lives - so house church fit both the Jewish and Roman practice of groups meeting in homes.

That's why all the New Testament was written by apostles doing church in the home, writing to people doing church in the home. The '5-fold', the charismatic gifts, the Lord's Supper, Baptisms water and Holy Spirit - all in context as happening in homes. If you've been part of the auditorium church, you've taken God's Word out of context, as has your pastor, every visiting teacher - and it doesn't work well to take God's Word out of context. Put it back in the home and you can toss the bookstore manuals on how to do church - it's all laid out in the pages of the New Testament.

Next week - focus on our times, how to start a house church. Until then, blessings,

John Fenn

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Starting 2024, Why house churches now. Starting one. 3 of 4

Hi all,

When we read Acts we see the focus on homes. Pentecost happened in a home. Peter went to the house of the Roman Centurion, Cornelius in Acts 10. Hosts and hostesses in homes are mentioned in Philippi, Thessalonica, Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Colossae, Laodicia.

How did they start? How can we start?

Consistently we see evangelism happening within 4 spheres of influence: Family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers.

6 of the original 12 apostles were brought to the Lord within those. In John 1:40-51 we see Andrew bringing his brother Peter, to meet Jesus. Family. The next verse said they had a neighbor named Philip, who met Jesus. Neighbor. He in turn invited a friend, Nathanael, to meet Jesus. Friend. In Luke 5:10 we are told Peter was a partner in a fishing business with James and John, who met Jesus when He borrowed their boat. Co-workers.

Family, friends, neighbors, co-workers are seen throughout the New Testament

In II Timothy 1:5 Paul mentions the faith of Timothy's grandmother, Eunice, who he says was first in the faith in the family, and the faith of his mother, Lois. In Colossians 4:10 Paul writes of Barnabas being the uncle of John Mark, the author of the gospel of Mark. Acts 12:12 says Mark's mother Mary, was hosting a prayer meeting for Peter when the angel released him from prison.

Luke 24:18 tells us one of the two walking to Emmaus was Cleopas. John's gospel which was written after Luke's, tells his readers in John 19:25 Cleopas was Jesus' uncle. He tells us Jesus' aunt, Mary's sister, was with her at the foot of the cross. The faithfulness of His aunt at the cross explains why the just risen Lord made the point to visit the 2 as they walked to Emmaus - He wanted to tell His uncle so he could tell his aunt, He was risen.

In Acts 18:1-3 Paul is joined in Corinth by fellow tent makers, Aquila and Priscilla, as that church was being started. Co-workers. They are mentioned 6x in the NT, including hosting house churches when they lived in Rome and Ephesus. And on and on it goes. Family, friends, neighbors, coworkers are seen throughout the New Testament.

So it is today. Many house churches are comprised of people within those 4 spheres of influence, especially in Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. But not always. In this day of the Internet, people no one in the house church knows, may be interested in coming to your house church. They may be a 'person of peace.'

An example of 'people of peace' joining you, in Philippi

A person of peace is first, someone who accepts you, but doesn't know the Lord. In Luke 10:3-9 the Lord says in such cases, build a relationship with the person, and only after that, share Jesus. A modern equivalent may be someone like that, or we may include a Christian no one in a current house church knows, but they want to come to your house church.

When Paul went to Philippi in Acts 16:12-40 there was no synagogue meeting, meaning there weren't 10 Jewish men age 13 or more to be able to form a weekly gathering. Paul learned some Jewish women went to the river to meet for prayer, so he went there looking for them.

"On the sabbath we went to the river where it was known prayer was made, and sat down and spoke to women gathered there." So the first thing is that someone is seeking a gathering of like-minded people. 'People of peace' we might say.

We also observe what was written of Lydia in Acts 16:14: "There was a woman there, Lydia, a worshipper of God, who listened to the words Paul spoke." Notice she was a worshipper of God, but was not yet born again. That changed when Paul told her of Jesus. She ended up inviting Paul and Silas to her home, and it appears the jailer as well. It is to them and others that Paul writes his warmest letter of all his epistles, the letter to the Philippians.

It may sound strange to say, but I've been to her house. The ruins have been preserved all these centuries, for after Christianity was legalized, her house was turned into a 'church', and you can visit it to this day.

There must be purpose to meeting: Acts 2:42, meeting 'steadfastly'.

In our day very often someone has a revelation that house church is for them. They need to be at a point where like the first century believers, going to temple is no longer for them.

Unfortunately in our day we also have people who say; "Maybe I'll check you out this week." They expect to visit a house church without any previous introduction, just like they would an auditorium church, so they are 'shopping'.

But house church is different. You're going to someone's home. Shoppers are rarely seen more than once or twice. People who have that revelation from heaven about relationship based faith, are all in from the start. They get it.

Let me be clear - God fills whatever structure man gives Him, so this is not against the auditorium style of the gathering of the saints called 'church'. Sometimes a person will visit a house church and it is all too new, with people they don't know, and decide they need the comfortable and familiar in the auditorium. That's fine.

A house church is not a place for evangelism, though a person of peace may choose to believe on the Lord in that setting. We see this mentioned in I Corinthians 14:22-25. A house church is safe and healthy, so it isn't the place to bring someone a host or hostess isn't comfortable with.

For such, the person who wants to bring them to house church needs to meet with them separately, 1 on 1, discipling them in the Lord for a time. Just because you are having church in a home doesn't mean you have to allow anyone and everyone into your home. A home meeting is intimate, personal, and a place for those you can trust.

Vetting: House church must be safe

If you aren't a family, friend, neighbor or coworker of someone in a house church, it takes a certain amount of determination and boldness to enter a stranger's home to be the 'new person' in a small group meeting.

Often this is done by meeting someone for coffee or tea in a public place, or for breakfast or lunch at a restaurant. It isn't an interrogation, but it is a time to find out why that person wants to attend, if they are goofy or potentially dangerous. to see if they are someone a host or hostess would be comfortable having in the home.

Jesus vetted people which may be a surprise to those who have never done house church. In Luke 9:57-62 Jesus had 3 separate men who came to Him and wanted to join the disciples. In the conversations He learned one wasn't aware that by following Jesus he would have no permanent home, another had the condition he first be allowed to bury a family member, and a third was wrapped up in family ties which would have made him double minded. In Luke 8:38-39 the man delivered of Legion begged to follow Jesus but was refused. Jesus told him no, but to go back to his home and his friends and tell them what Jesus had done for them.

Family, friends, neighbors, co-workers, people of peace. People that people in the Bible felt comfortable inviting into their homes. It is the same for us today.

We'll stop here for today and wrap up this series next week. Until then, blessings,
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House churches for 2024, What a HC looks like. 4 of 4

Hi all,
What does a house church meeting look like? How to start?

Elements of house church

We see a pattern in Acts 2:42: "They were steadfastly in the apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking bread, and prayer." There is no other pattern given than that. Paul later shares about the flow of a meeting (below), but of structure, we find no instruction nor pattern to follow other than these 4 elements tied together by a steady determination to grow in Christ.

The word 'steadfastly' is the Greek word 'proskartereo'. 'Pros' means 'towards together with', 'kartereo' means 'to show steadfast strength'. They were committed to growing in the Lord with others. We find no disciples in the NT all by themselves, no church that was all by itself.

We encourage all the house churches affiliated with us - stay connected to the local body of Christ, and stay connected with those in the network. We see this throughout Acts and Paul's letters - people traveling back and forth between the churches. Today it can also be by Internet, conferences, and travel between churches.

In the NT we see 3 groups of people. The first is like the leaders of Ephesus seen in Acts 20:17, whose hearts are just for their local body. We have no record of any of them traveling to any other church. This is by far the largest group of people involved in house church.

The second group are those who make short trips to other churches and then back home. The starts and ends of Paul's letters mention some of them. And the 3rd group and more rare in our day, is the one who travels constantly to different nations and churches strengthening the brethren. I only know of 1 or 2 people like that. So if you have no interest in traveling to others, that's fine.

They worked through difficulties with one another

A pattern we've seen is that for the first 3 months everyone has on their 'church face'. In the 3 to 6 month time the church faces fade and people start opening up to the reality of life - you start to hear the stresses and hardships. And if there are issues with children behaving, that will be seen right away as all are guests in someone's home.

IF a person or family will stay with it through 6 months of meetings, true friendships form. People realize house church is safe, everyone 'has your back', that every person and every family has issues in one form or another. There is no threat, people start to relax.

More than that, they start to change. Often the changes are subtle but significant. Family dynamics start to change for the better. People/families are changed from the inside out.

House church doesn't affirm one's faith by stained glass and a set structure with a set speaker each week. House church affirms one's faith through the surrounding people. By the mutual sharing week by week what the Lord is doing in you, what struggles are being faced, what answered prayers and victories have been answered and won.

It is in the 6-12 month time frame a house church starts to become a family. Six months to a year to only then start to realize the dynamics of a healthy and balanced house church relationships.

House church is messy. House church in comparison to the laser lights, smoke and ear-blasting musical production called 'worship', is boring. It's boring because it is normal life in that we walk through with others. We support one another. You won't have your ears tickled. You'll hear revelations others have received from the Lord. Things He taught them, and you can share what He is teaching you. All are edified. But it is so subtle if you are looking for fleshly impulses, you will be disappointed.

I Corinthians 14:26-40:Decently and in order

When we combine the steadfast commitment for the purpose of growing in the Lord with Paul's instructions of politeness and 'decently and in order', we see a relaxed gathering in someone's home that is safe, focused on growing in Christ, and full of peace.

In I Corinthians 14:26-40, he recognizes a situation very similar to many house churches in our day as well. In their time Acts 18:1-9 tells us 3 cultures were meeting in the home of a Roman man named Justus. Jews, Greeks, and Romans would not normally meet together socially. Many of those attending don't know others. They are strangers at the start.

Certainly Jews would not enter the home of a Gentile, let alone have a meal with them. Greek and Romans wouldn't normally meet together. But now these 3 cultures are meeting and eating together bound by their walk with the Lord. From I Corinthians 11:17-31 we see some did not want to eat with the others, their prejudice opening themselves up to sickness.

So when Paul writes in I Corinthians 14:26-40 about things done 'decently and in order', he includes instructions on how to be a guest in someone's home where all you have in common with others is Jesus. His instructions include if you have a word from the Lord but no opportunity to share it, keep it to yourself.

If you have a word or something you want to say, but the person next to you also wants to share, defer to them and let them share. Take turns. Don't monopolize the conversation. Don't push your own favorite teaching. Anything you say may be rejected. If the discussion rises to the level of confusion, let questions and further discussion done in your own home. (Wives ask their husbands at home because for the first time in their lives they are sitting together - so ask at home if the questions are too disruptive.)

Modern updates would include things like; If a door is closed, don't open it, the host has it closed for a reason. Don't peek into someone's medicine cabinet in the bathroom. Help clean up whether the meeting included a meal or not. Don't overstay the purpose and time for a meeting, and so on.

The host/hostess has the final word

What we have found that works, is that no matter who leads a meeting, the host or hostess determines the time allotted for the meeting.

For instance, if a meeting starts at 10am and a host allow people to stay all afternoon, or even into the evening, soon they will become exhausted and 'burned out'. Balance and politeness are key. Most people won't overstay their welcome, but a host or hostess should not be afraid to let such a one know they need move on to other things for the day.

Very often someone leading a house church has never led a group of anyone before. They aren't used to calling a meeting to order and hesitate interrupting conversations. I've been in house churches where the starting time was 10am, but at 11am people are still talking and eating, the host or hostess not wanting to interrupt. It's a learned skill to get everyone's attention to tell them what they have in mind for the meeting, but necessary.

Teaching, fellowship, food, prayer. Usually a meeting will include those elements as seen in Acts 2:42. Sometimes there is no food other than water or coffee. Sometimes the only prayer might be before eating food. Sometime 'teaching' takes the form of 1 person sharing what the Lord taught them that week, and then a 90 minute discussion and study happens - Acts 2:42 is just an outline for elements of their meetings.

There is so much more to share, which is why we have audio series such as 'House Church 101' on our site, 10 question and answer videos about house church, Return of the First Church, and more.

House church is that gathering of friends, family, neighbors and coworkers seen through the pages of the New Testament. It isn't for everyone and we celebrate however the saints choose to gather. But for some, looking for people on the same spiritual page in genuine relationships in Christ, house church is for them. Perhaps that includes some reading this series. Do your homework, but allow revelation from the Lord change you from the inside out. Be moved from that revelation in your heart towards a relationship based faith rather than an auditorium based faith.

Food for thought, new subject next week. Until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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