

MEETING TOGETHER

Hebrews 10v19-25

In recent weeks I have been looking at the Bible principles behind cell groups. This morning I am asking: What happens when the group meets? I will be very specific and practical. But I have a problem to start with!

There is no formula or blueprint in the New Testament for group meetings (or corporate church meetings for that matter.) There is no prescribed pattern laid down in Scripture. There is no systematic teaching. That is why there is so much variety in form and content in house meetings among the churches. We need to be clear about this as we ask what happens in a group meeting.

When we look through the New Testament we only have a few snapshots. In the Gospels we see Jesus meeting with His disciples in homes, and in 'Acts' we have a variety of incidents, all of them unique. The apostolic letters are probably more instructive. Most were written to house churches and they concentrate on principles rather than patterns.

Today let's look at one such text: **Hebrews 10v19-25**. I wouldn't want to press this too far, but I will suggest that the ingredients of the classic cell group "4 W's" format can be found here i.e. Welcome, Worship, Word and Witness. These give us the key to *why* we meet together. i.e. what we hope will happen and what we want to achieve when we meet. Each represents a different relationship.

- 'Welcome' is about you and me relating to one another.
- 'Worship' is about all of us coming to God.
- 'Word' is about God addressing us and building us up in our faith..
- 'Witness' is about God reaching out to the world through us.

These are four vital ingredients of cell group meetings. So let's look at Hebrews 10. I am using Eugene Peterson's paraphrase 'The Message' today.

1. Welcome – you to me. (v19-21)

Making 'Welcome' an important feature of meeting together is rooted in glorious theology. God makes *us* welcome, therefore *we* should make one another welcome. In ch.4v16: we read "*Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence.*" Now, in our text we read:

So, friends, we can now - without hesitation - walk right up to God, into "the Holy Place." Jesus has cleared the way by the blood of his sacrifice, acting as our priest before God. The "curtain" into God's presence is his body.

The writer is not talking about visiting the temple. Ordinary worshippers were never allowed into the Most Holy Place. Now, because of Jesus, every believer can enter into the Presence of God. By God becoming man in Jesus and dying on the cross, we have been given access. This is the "*new and*

living way". Now we don't need to be in a religious building. We can enter God's Presence wherever we are – and that includes a domestic house.

God makes us welcome. His arms are wide open. There is no frown on His face; no censure in His tone; no condemnation in His words. And it is all because of Jesus. Therefore we should make one another welcome. The way we welcome one another proclaims this great truth. And it will often determine whether some people come regularly or even come back again. This is true on Sundays and at group meetings; it is true for those who are already part of the church and those who come among us as guests.

The first of the 4 W's says, "*Welcome!*" In a group meeting the first 15 minutes or so is given over to making sure everyone feels at ease. This involves refreshments. There will be a mix of voices and laughter as people catch up with one another. Here are some things to be aware of.

1. When a cell evening feels like a group of friends gathering, you will feel welcome and you be eager to be there and loathe to miss out.
2. When someone comes for the first time it is crucial they are not left on the edge, nor made the centre of attraction. Avoid both extremes.
3. When someone arrives late welcome them warmly. Make sure they are offered refreshments. Late arrivals are usually because of work pressures, child minders, travel or something unforeseen.
4. 'Icebreakers' can be helpful, especially when a new group is getting off the ground; but after that they become surplus to requirements. What's the point of interrupting a wonderful babble of free flowing conversation with: "*Now, let's have the Icebreaker!*"? I also suggest you never use the word "Icebreaker". It can cause ice to form where there is none.
5. Avoid moving the evening on by saying: "*Now let's get started!*" This implies that what has been happening is not significant. It also puts everybody into "meeting" mode and kills the relational foundation that has just been built up.

2. Worship – us to God (v22)

So let's do it - full of belief, confident that we're presentable inside and out.

What a privilege! We can enter into God's Presence and worship Him. So let's do it! When we meet we want to enjoy the Presence of God. Nothing is more refreshing and energising. Jesus is in the midst of us. He makes us presentable to God. The door is open.

So here are some practical things to bear in mind when we worship together.

1. In cell group worship we are looking for lots of participation. The person leading should be encouraging everyone to contribute in song and

prayer or reading Scripture. This is also the ideal context to start out in spiritual gifts. 1 Corinthians 14v26. *“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.”*

2. This may lead into personal ministry and prayer. However, some people are not comfortable with being prayed for in a group. Leaders will usually know the people well enough to know when someone may need to be “protected” or, indeed, be *encouraged* to receive prayer.
3. Sometimes it is helpful to have bread and wine available so that you can move on to remembering Christ’s death in this way. The ideal setting for this is a meal, but this is not always possible.
4. On occasions a whole evening can be given over to worship and spiritual gifts and ministry to one another. The Holy Spirit may be very active among you and the evening agenda should then go out the window!

3. Word – God to us. (v23)

Let's keep a firm grip on the promises that keep us going. He always keeps his word.

To “hold unswervingly to the hope we profess” (NIV) the Scriptures are vital. Therefore the Bible should have an important place in our group meetings. Colossians 3v16: *“Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.”*

By God’s Word we are able to hear what He is saying to us, be built up in our faith, and get equipped to live to please God. 2 Timothy 3v16,17: *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

1. In our group meetings someone usually gives a summary of the Sunday message, as a reminder for those who were present and as catch-up for any who were missing. It is important to read the text of the Bible because it is this we want to look at more than the preacher’s message! Some discussion questions are provided but the group may have their own.
2. This pattern can be varied. In our group we gear the evening in the most helpful way for some among us who are looking into the Christian faith. To follow up our recent Alpha, this week we discussed Matthew 9 to 11 after watching a film of those chapters on DVD.

3. It is so healthy for the group to have people present who are looking into the Christian faith, or those who have recently come to faith. It keeps you on your toes! You cannot lapse into Christian jargon; you have to answer some unusual questions. You need to know your way around the Bible, and know what you believe and why you believe!
4. Whatever the content, the one leading should not dominate or use the group meeting as a platform to preach. Everyone should have the opportunity to speak if they want to. It is a time when we can share on a personal level, discuss important issues, ask our questions, learn from one another and listen to other people's perspectives.

4. Witness – God through us. (v24,25)

Let's see how inventive we can be in encouraging love and helping out, not avoiding worshipping together as some do but spurring each other on, especially as we see the big Day approaching.

There is a needy world out there that God wants to reach through you and me. Cell group meetings are an ideal setting to encourage and spur one another for this mission. How do we do this in our group meetings?

1. We should always be planning our next social. This is such an important ingredient of cell group life. Some groups also set aside one group evening in the month to invite friends to a meal – simply a social occasion to build bridges of friendship.
2. We can pray for one another's circle of friends. Can we invite them to a group social or a church event? What about the Christmas Nativity? Would any enjoy a Marriage Course or be open to doing Alpha? Do any of our friends or neighbours have needs we can pray for?
3. We can spur one another on by sharing any opportunities we have had to share the gospel or demonstrate the love of God over the past week. It was this which challenged me most in my very first cell group.
4. We can also do some training on group nights! Everyone could write out their story of coming to faith and then be asked to share it with the group in one minute - or two if you are long-winded! Or learn a simple way of sharing the gospel with a seeker using a simple diagram, and then practise it on each other in two's.

Finally, the writer of 'Hebrews' injects something else to galvanise his readers. He mentions the approaching "Day" i.e. when Jesus Christ will return and wrap up history. For most of our "big Day" will be when we die and stand before God's throne! Until then we are to be wide awake and fully engaged in our mission with the gospel. This is not a time to sleep or retire. Our group meetings play a vital part in this, helping us to spur one another on.

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