



# Awakenings

"Only by love is love awakened."

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What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, *each of you* has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up" (Paul, 1 Corinthians 14.26, emphasis added).

## *HeartGroups Series, Part 2*

(for the complete series please see <http://www.renewedheartministries.com/Esights/10-09-2012> and onward.)

# *Mutual, Open Sharing in Living Rooms versus Passive Spectatorship in Auditoriums*

by Herb Montgomery

This week, I want to build upon what we looked at last week: the relationship that exists among the Godhead (as taught by Jesus) is the clearest example we have been given of the God-intended nature of our gatherings.

From the very beginning, I want to say that this in no way a critique of any church fellowship, tradition, denomination, or institutional church. HeartGroups (as introduced by our Ministry Update news email last week) are not in competition with, nor meant to be a replacement for, whatever institutional religious experience someone may (or may not) already be engaged in. HeartGroups are only intended to be supplementary. HeartGroups are modeled after the early New Testament-era church gatherings. Yet, this should not be taken to mean that God cannot or is not working through other modes of gathering together as well. At Renewed Heart Ministries, we have modeled our HeartGroups after the early church, simply because 1) we have the clearest instruction for this type of gathering from the text of the New Testament, and 2) we have seen it to be the most holistic way for followers of Jesus to experience real and mutual growth, within the context of genuine fellowship and an authentic community.

But enough about all of that! Let's dive right in to our topic this week by looking briefly at a few texts.

1 Corinthians 14.26: What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, **each of you** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue, or an interpretation. Everything must be done so that the church may be built up. (Some have suggested that this was the problem with the Corinthian church, but a quick survey of the entire New Testament disproves this. This was how all churches in the New Testament operated. Paul, in his letter, does not seek to squelch the open, mutually participatory nature of the Corinthian gatherings that turned the majority of those gathered into spectators. On the contrary, Paul gives guidelines on how to exercise mutual respect, so that the mutual, openly participatory gatherings will be done orderly and respectfully.)

Romans 15.14: I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and **competent to instruct one another**.

Colossians 3.16: Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you **teach and admonish one another** with all wisdom through psalms, hymns and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

Hebrews 10.24, 25: And let us consider how we may **spur one another on** toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Matthew 20:25, 26: Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you**. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant."

Matthew 23.8, 9: "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and **you are all brothers**. And do not call anyone on earth 'father,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven." (This is not a gender exclusive statement. The early church included sisters too, some of whom were Apostles themselves; but at this stage, Jesus is talking, literally, to twelve "men.")

Ephesians 4.15, 16: Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by **every supporting ligament**, grows and **builds itself up in love, as each part** does its work.

Meditate on these passages, if you will. This week, I want you to notice that, in each of the above passages, the nature of the early New Testament church is clearly described. They were open, mutually participatory gatherings where each person was free to share. They were not marked by command-style leadership. There were no hierarchical structures; no passive spectatorship;

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no one-upmanship; and no religious rituals and programs. Rather, just as we witnessed among the Godhead last week, these groups were marked by complementary and reciprocal interchanges, love, and fellowship.

These early New Testament gatherings were marked by mutual love, mutual fellowship, mutual dependence, mutual honor, mutual submission, mutual dwelling, and authentic community.

This actually explains why the role of a New Testament Apostle is so unique from anything we have today. (Apostles were church planters, but in a very unique fashion; see Ephesians 4.12, 13). After the Gospel had been preached and there were those who had genuine encounters with God through the person of Jesus, the Apostle would stay in the area for a temporary time, with one goal in mind: Establish and develop a group with an open, mutually participatory nature, and once it's off and running, leave it! These fellowships were not to be led by the Apostle. No, no! They were to function with mutual participation, with Christ as their head (Ephesians 2.14, 15).

With the help and encouragement of the Apostle, those within the group who had a natural tendency to take over would have to learn, over time, to listen more to others in the group and to submit more to the headship of Christ Himself in each gathering (Ephesians 4.15, 16). Those who were not comfortable sharing needed time, encouragement, and support from the group, as they became more comfortable, and over time, confident, in sharing and edifying the group with the ways in which Jesus was leading them as well. From a human view point, the work of the Apostle was about teaching those who like to share to also listen more, and for those who are not comfortable sharing to become more comfortable. From a Divine viewpoint, it was about teaching a group to, together, submit to the Headship of Jesus Himself; it was not just having a gathering about Jesus, but actually allowing Him to sit in the driver's seat and serve as the leader of each gathering (Again, see Ephesians 4.15-16).

The early church was marked by the very traits that we find in the triune God, particularly mutual love, mutual fellowship, mutual dependence, mutual honor, mutual submission, mutual dwelling, and an authentic community. The church's gatherings were marked by:

- face-to-face community
- the functioning of every member
- open-participation meetings (as opposed to preacher-to-spectator services)
- non-hierarchical leadership
- The centrality and supremacy of Jesus Christ, not just as the central subject, but the functional leader and head of each gathering as well.

It's such a paradigm shift to discover that almost all of Paul's letters (Ephesians is the only exception) were written to open participatory "churches" that were in crises. He never addresses the "clergy" or "leadership offices" of those churches but always the churches themselves:

Galatians 1.1: Paul, an apostle . . . **to the churches** in Galatia.

1 Thessalonians 1.1: Paul, Silas and Timothy, **to the church** of the Thessalonians.

2 Thessalonians 1.1: Paul, Silas and Timothy, **to the church** of

the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

1 Corinthians 1.1,2: Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes, **to the church** of God in Corinth, to those sanctified in Christ Jesus and called to be his holy people, together with all those everywhere who call on the name of our Lord Jesus Christ—their Lord and ours.

2 Corinthians 1.1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, **to the church** of God in Corinth, together with all his holy people throughout Achaia.

Romans 1.1-7: Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God . . . **to all** in Rome who are loved by God and called to be his holy people.

Colossians 1.1, 2: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, to God's holy **people** in Colossae, the faithful brothers and sisters in Christ.

Ephesians 1.1: Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, to God's holy **people** in Ephesus, the faithful in Christ Jesus.

Philippians 1.1: Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to **all** God's holy **people** in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons. (This is the only letter that includes "overseers" (plural) in whom the letter is addressed to, and even this occurrence mentions them only in passing. Following this greeting, Paul talks to the church about its present problems. And he never again mentions the overseers. This trend is highlighted in the book of Hebrews. Throughout the entire epistle, the writer addresses the entire church. Only at the very end does the writer offhandedly ask the believers to greet their "overseers." Hebrews 13.24 We'll talk about "leadership" in just a moment.)

Why? Because there were no "clergy" as we know it today in these small gatherings. Why? Because there were no *laity* in Paul's headspace, but rather a priesthood (today, it would be called "pastorhood") of all believers.

Today, we are at the tail end of centuries of teaching the members of God's church to simply function as weekly "spectators." This is so deeply ingrained and has been done to such a degree that many don't even have the confidence to embrace a gathering where they could take a more active, participatory role in exercising their own spiritual gifts. Many don't even know what their gifts are (Some, on the other hand, are *dying* for this kind of mutual fellowship). But the mere fact that we have to resort to "tests" to discover our spiritual gifts, rather than letting them become obvious to everyone in an open, mutually participatory gathering, is proof within itself of how far off the path we have strayed.

Let's take a look at another revealing passage that tells us how these gatherings were conducted:

Acts 2.42-47: They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship; to the breaking of bread and to prayer...They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God...

In light of this passage, one possible "HeartGroup" format (and I want to stress, ONE! Each HeartGroup will be a mixture of folks with different spiritual gifts; no two HeartGroups will ever look the same, just like the early church), is as follows:

Meet ahead of time for prayer. Mutually open, participatory gatherings require more prayer, not less. Then, as more people begin to show up, take time to actually eat together. Each

person should bring a dish. This breaks the ice and gets things started. It's what Acts 2.42 refers to as the "Breaking of Bread" together. Then, once everyone has eaten, you could move into a mutual sharing or praise time. Although this will be done in a way that respects each person (no one interrupting another), this is a time of spontaneity and open sharing, whether through song, something Jesus has shown you in his word that week, an experience where Jesus has taught you something that week, or periods of mutually participatory prayer. A unique but fun example would be if someone wrote a song about Jesus this week and wanted to share it with the group. This could easily become a sing-along. Or, if someone had some cool insight into one of the Gospels, then the group could openly discuss it, or even some life experience that Jesus was speaking to them through. Most of all, we want God's direction to be first and foremost and for ours to always be held as secondary. Each person is open to share or even stop and pray. This is when we practice the 52 "One Anothers" of the New Testament.

**One exercise I am extremely fond of that binds a group together is what I call "Encouragement and Affirmation Time."**

This is a time where each person is, in turn, affirmed and encouraged by the group. This is the unique time when we get to, in a very unique and purposeful way, express our love for one another, encourage one another, and build each other up (1 Thessalonians 5.11).

Again, many of us don't even know what our gifts are. For many of us, it's going to take time for us to even work up the courage to share. Let's face it; we have spent our lives, most of us, in training to be nothing more than weekly spectators. But, as each week passes, we will get closer to the mutually participatory nature that the gatherings of Jesus' followers were originally intended to possess. Be patient with yourselves. This will not happen overnight. It's a journey, not a destination. Enjoy it!

Over time, leadership will evolve in your group. (This is not a leadersless model.) But even when leadership evolves, this leadership is NOT hierarchal. It's not top-down. It's not one person leading out and everyone else "spectating". New Testament "leadership" was "servant" leadership. The role of a leader/overseer was to protect the group's mutual open sharing from being taken over by one or a few. The role of an "elder" or "overseer" in a group was not how they are defined in many churches today. Rather, overseers were to serve the group by protecting the mutual, open sharing of each gathering. (This was the role of the New Testament Elders. This was not an office in the early church, but a function of the older more experienced (i.e. "elders") followers of Jesus in the group. This is our hope for HeartGroups as well. When leadership arises, and it always will, that those leaders realize they are simply overseers, theirs is a "role". They do not hold an "office" but serve a "function.")

Let's finish up this week with a look at just three more texts:

Romans 16.5: Greet also the church that meets **at their house**.

1 Corinthians 16.19: 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**.

Colossians 4.15: Give my greetings to the brothers and sisters at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church **in her house**.

Without entering into the endless debate about the necessity of "church" buildings, the fact the early church met in the homes of followers of Jesus is a point that must not be overlooked (For the first three hundred years of Christian history, followers of Jesus met exclusively in "homes." The first "church" buildings did not appear until the fourth century after the "conversion" of Constantine. This, too, was a time when the church was growing exponentially). Why is this noteworthy? A HeartGroup can meet anywhere, but



I personally know of no other environment that is more conducive to open, mutually participatory gatherings than a living room. It's informal. It's designed around relationships. And, it's where the early church met too! There is no other setting that encourages, in my experience, a gathering of this

nature to simply just "happen" as effectively.

This week, I also want to add that this type of gathering not only requires that one's picture of God looks like Jesus, but also, like no other gathering to my knowledge, the fostering of fellowships and gatherings that, by their very nature, demonstrate most effectively the radical, other-centered, self-sacrificial love of God, as revealed in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. Remember, we demonstrate the truth about God, not just by our beliefs, but how we "do life" too! When it comes to how we do life "together," this is no exception.

If you would like to try a HeartGroup on for size, or if you are already gathering in early New Testament style, please drop us a line ([heartgroups@renewedhearministries.com](mailto:heartgroups@renewedhearministries.com)). We'd love to spend some time either encouraging you, helping you start a HeartGroup in your area, and/or just listening to how God is blessing your already existing group. Remember, just like the children of every parent, (See last week where we discussed how the early churches were simply the "children of the Godhead.") each HeartGroup is going to be just as unique from one another as two children can be who are from the same set of parents. But no matter how unique those children are, they will carry within them the same DNA. What is the common thread, DNA for a HeartGroup, that we also find in each of the early churches? The "One Anothers" of the New Testament. The every-member-lovingly-sharing, mutually open participatory (verses passive spectatorship) nature of the Godhead itself! No two HeartGroups will look the same. But what all HeartGroups should have in common, is what we have covered in this eSight at the very

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minimum. These are not glorified Bible Studies (although each person is sharing from their Bibles) where the same person leads out each week. Nor are these just "church" on a smaller scale. (Think of it like a church "Potluck" where everyone brings a "dish." This is just Christ centered, praise and fellowship, Potluck style, where everyone has prepared and brought something (Not a whole meal (i.e a Sermon), but just a dish remember, of what Jesus has been teaching you that previous week) to share and edify the group with. Again, this is a gathering where Christ Himself is the head, and any human leadership that is present is simply ensuring that Headship is not taken over by anyone else.

"But speaking the truth [to one another] in love, we must grow up in every way into him who is **the head**, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by **every ligament** with which it is equipped, as **each part is working properly**, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love." Ephesians 4.15-16

It's a new paradigm for some to think about, for sure. But, you don't have to think too hard. Try starting a HeartGroup in your area and see where Jesus leads it. You don't have to be in charge; He'll take care of that. You simply provide the location. The group itself, through the leadership of Jesus Himself, provides the food, the fellowship, and the mutual teaching, instruction, encouragement, and edification.

As always, keep living in love, loving like Christ, and keep enlarging the Kingdom, one relationship at a time.

*Herb*

# Testimonies

I am the lady that came to you at the book signing that told you that you were at Oklahoma Camp meeting for me. I can't listen to a sermon now without applying what I learned from you. Now that my family is home I so appreciate you driving all night and for you to come and show me the Father. Thank you so much for caring and sharing this information. It has changed my life forever. I know Jesus sent you to camp meeting. Thank You for showing me who Jesus is! - **SW**

I was raised in an ultra conservatively religious home and was sent to all the right schools. As an adult I decided the hypocrisy and legalism of religion had no place in the happy, fulfilling life I was trying to live. My family lives in North Carolina and my mother faithfully attended a series you gave at Lake Junaluska this year (2012) where I also used to attend as a child. She mailed me the DVD's of your talks each day and also your book. I have found myself moving between shouting at the tv in relief and kneeling on my living room floor in tears at your words. Thank you for having the courage to speak your words of honesty! Through your ministry I have discovered a beautiful, fulfilling relationship with God and His unconditional love. I now find myself trying to minister to my family who raised me with such judgment! Imagine that! Thank you for the difference you have made in my life. - **ET**

## Featured Presentation



This month, we are featuring a presentation in our new *Life Unlimited* series. This presentation is an honest look at the nature of the gatherings of the New Testament church. What these gatherings, in the first century, were able to do, by the combination of both form (open and mutually participatory) and focus (Jesus as the truth about what kind of a person God really is), in people's lives as they grew together in Jesus is astounding! We are convinced at RHM that Jesus designed the revelation of the Father's radical, self sacrificial, other centered love, as reflected in US, to be manifested to others in the context of authentic community. Our prayer is that you too will begin a beautiful journey, just as early followers of Jesus experienced long ago, as you listen to this month's presentation—*Doing Life Together* by Herb Montgomery

## Schedule

### NOVEMBER 2-4, 2012

North Cascade Adventist Church  
Burlington, WA  
360.757.7577

### NOVEMBER 5-10, 2012

Kirkland Adventist School/  
Edmonds Adventist Church  
Kirkland, WA and Edmonds, WA  
425.822.7554

### NOVEMBER 16-18, 2012

North Fork Adventist Church  
North Fork, CA  
559.479.9403

### JANUARY 11-13, 2013

Naperville Adventist Church  
Naperville, IL  
708.514.5723

### JANUARY 18-20, 2013

Raymond Adventist Church  
Franksville, WI  
262.878.5133

### JANUARY 25-27, 2013

Summersville Adventist Church  
Summersville, WV  
304.872.6958

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