

Presentation of Small Groups

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[0 : 00] Balance. Balance is an important thing to maintain in life. Harmony among the parts of the whole. Each thing in its right proportion. We're seeing in this Sunday school study on the happy Christian that balance is the secret of the happy Christian.

One that facts more than feelings equals more happiness. Well facts and feelings they're both in the scriptures aren't they? They address both. But do we live upon our feelings or do we live upon facts? No facts more than feelings. We need the proper balance and proportion. The biblical proportion of these two things if we're to be happy Christians. Both are necessary. But in their right amounts.

We looked at the happy church. It's where there are more words about salvation than there than there are words about sin. That equals the happy church. Now does that mean that we don't talk about sin in church? Absolutely not. We'd have to cut out much of our Bible.

We must speak about sin. But sin is not given the last word in scripture. Salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord is. So we need a right balance of these two things. Of salvation in Christ and sin. The right balance between gospel and law.

More wooing than warning. More wooing than warning. More victory than struggle. More celebration than lamentation. We studied lamentation. We studied lamentation. Back on July the third as we met. To lament the evil of our nation. That's biblical. That's something we are meant to do before the Lord. To grieve before him for the sins of our nation.

[1 : 55] But more celebration than lamentation. A right balance. So churches often reflect the imbalances of their pastors.

And that points out the wisdom of God in teaching in the New Testament. That each church is to have a plurality of elders. Not just one man so that his imbalances are then reproduced in the congregation.

But a plurality of elders. And that helps to balance out the strengths and weaknesses working together for the balance of the church's diet in preaching.

And what is the emphasis and the example that is set before him. It's also why it's God's normal plan for every child to have both a father and a mother. To have the balance of a father's toughness with a mother's tenderness.

They need both. And so that's God's plan for balance in the home. Well, there's many issues over which churches can be imbalanced.

[3 : 05] Often we do the pendulum thing. And when we see a problem or something that we know is wrong, we can just swing right over to the other extreme.

Or we're driving down the road and we see something scary in the left ditch. And we're so afraid of falling into that ditch that we overcorrect and we go into the ditch on the right side.

It's a loss of balance. And imbalance often is the reaction to other imbalances or errors. How many one-wing birds do you know about?

God created them with two wings. I suppose that's why our airplanes have wings on both sides. Balance of the aircraft, of the bird.

So balance. It's a beautiful thing, but it's a difficult thing. It's not easy to maintain. It's not something that we do once and we just get the balance right and we say, there.

[4 : 11] Now, save. Lock in. No, we easily get out of balance. And so there's this need to keep coming back and examining. And are we balanced according to the proportion of God's word?

The emphases that he gives us. Keeping the main thing, the main thing, but not the only thing. And so keeping the other things in their right place, but not infringing upon the main thing.

Variety. It's the spice of life. There's much of it that God gives us, but it must be variety in the balance and along the proportion and priorities of Scripture. Now, that includes the need for church. That means, then, that churches as well as individuals need to maintain this balance.

And your elders are charged with seeking to set before the congregation this proper balance in our diet as a church. But it also includes a balance, not only in what we preach, but the various means of grace in the shared life of the church.

[5 : 23] There in Acts chapter 2, verse 42, the day of Pentecost, the church in Jerusalem hit a growth spurt. 3,000 saved in a day, added to the church.

And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer.

Do you see the variety in the means of grace, the ways that God grows his church? It's not just one thing. It's a variety of things. Preaching.

We strongly believe in the primacy of preaching in the worship of God. That above everything else, we need to know what God says. And so we preach the word.

We sing the word. We pray the word. We fellowship around the word. The word of God and its teaching has a primary place. But it's not the only thing a church needs.

[6 : 22] It's not if this verse, Acts 2, 42, is for us as well. What's a church without the prayer meeting? And so we have that as another means of grace.

What of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper? When the church pauses and puts on hold all the other activity and just focuses on the main thing.

Christ and him crucified. That's part of the way that the Christian's health is kept maximum.

And then there's fellowship. There's shared life. Sharing in one another's gifts. Sharing in one another's burdens. One another's example. One another's thoughts and insights and encouragement and graces of God's spirit that minister to one another.

So all of these are means of grace to help us. And each needs its proper place in maintaining a biblical balance. So that's all a rather lengthy introduction into an announcement that God willing, on July 29th, that's two weeks from today, we will be holding small group meetings on Sunday evenings.

[7 : 39] Not every Sunday evening. Just the last Sunday evening of each month. And we'll do that for a duration of five months, July through November.

Now, more on the particulars later. Let me just say now, we're not announcing a permanent change. Again, this is all part of trying to balance the full life of the church.

And so this is a trial for five meetings spread over five months. At the end of the year, we'll have to evaluate and decide what the schedule will be for next year. So that's the plan.

One, what are our aims in these small groups? What are we after? Why are we doing this? You know it's not just a knee-jerk reaction to what others are doing because we would have done it, what, 20, 30, 40 years ago?

But we're doing it for these reasons, and we want you to understand them. What are we after? What's our target? Well, our target is not another Bible study.

[8 : 46] Now, there's nothing wrong with that aim. If that's the aim and the need for another Bible study, that's fine. Once in a while, we break up on Sunday schools, don't we?

And we have different groups doing different studies in smaller groups. We appreciate that idea. That's not the purpose of our five small group sessions.

Neither are we working together on some service project. Which, again, is a worthy goal to work shoulder to shoulder in some needy, some service to needy people.

But let me list just several aims that we do have. And this in the aim to tailor-make them to seek to meet our need for balance at Grace Fellowship Church.

For our first aim, see if you can figure out what is it? What is our aim for small groups? I'm going to have three men read a set of texts.

[9 : 48] You can all turn them up. And I want you to listen and think, what do they all have in common? And they will reveal one of our aims in these small groups. So, Matthew 7, 21 to 27.

Matthew 7, 21 to 27. I'm going to ask Dave Richards if you'll read that for us. And then you might hold your place there.

We're going to read them all together. But Ezekiel 33, 30 to 32. Mark Aikens, if you'd read that section for us.

That's Ezekiel 33, 30 to 32. And the last section is James 1, 19 to 25. James 1, 19 to 25.

Tom Haney, if you'd read that for us. Now, let's have Matthew 7, 21 to 27.

[10:52] We're looking for the aim in these small groups. All right? What do these have in common? Matthew 7, 21 to 27. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.

But the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, Lord, Lord, did you not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And then I will declare to you, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like the wise man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat on that house. But it did not fall because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like the foolish man who built his house on the sand.

And the rains fell and the floods came and the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell. And great was the fall of it. All right.

[12:05] Thank you. Hold your place there. We may turn back to it. Ezekiel 33 verses 30 to 32. As for you, son of man, your people are talking together about you by the walls and the doors of the houses, saying to each other, come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.

My people come to you as they usually do and sit before you to hear your words. But they do not put them into practice. Their mouths speak love, while their hearts are grieved for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well. For they hear your words, but do not put them into practice.

Thank you. And then James 1, 19 to 25. My dear brothers, take note of this. Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.

For man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral guilt and the evil that is so prevalent. Now, how do they accept the word planted in you, which can save you?

[13:19] Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror, and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like.

But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it, he will be blessed in what he does.

Okay, thank you. Those texts are pretty clear. I don't think we need to turn back and exposit them any further. Just to ask you, what do they have in common?

And what might you draw from that would be our aim in the small groups? Anyone? Okay, they all talk about obeying the word of God.

What else do they talk about? Yeah, Bruce? Okay. Okay? All right. So there's a submission to that law, or that word as God's word, and listening to it.

[14:33] Anything else? There's a contrast going on here. What's the contrast between? Listening and doing. Listening and doing. Right?

Okay? Each passage was emphasizing that. The Ezekiel passage. Listen to my people. They're all talking about, let's go hear the word of the Lord.

And they come, and they sit before you, and they look so willing to hear the word of God. But what's wrong? They will not do what God says.

And so Jesus picks up that very language, doesn't he? And he uses it. And James, the half-brother of Jesus, recalls the same teaching of his half-brother and sets it before us.

Now, we do a lot of listening to the word of God at Grace Fellowship Church. And this is not to condemn you and say, we don't think you're putting it into practice, or you're not doing it.

[15:32] But we are concerned that our balance be right between listening to the word of God and putting into practice, or doing God's word.

There are many other places. You remember the time that Jesus was teaching, and someone told him, your mother and brothers are standing outside wanting to see you. And he replied, my mother

and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice. That's the family of God. They're marked for both activities. Hearing with that humble reception of the word, but then putting it into practice.

Jesus said it, my sheep listen to my voice. I know them, and they follow me. They follow me, and whatever I tell them to do, they do it.

So that's the first aim. It's too easy to deceive ourselves, James says.

[16:40] That if we're just hearers, and we come, and we leave, and we think, that was a good sermon. I'm done.

We've got it wrong. As we leave each week, having heard God's word preached, our work is just beginning, isn't it? It's listen to do.

Listen to practice. Listen to believe. Listen to trust. Listen to do whatever it is that God says. So as we leave, we want to leave with this mentality.

I'm just beginning with these passages of scriptures. It's not the end. I've just heard them now. I'm ready to put them into practice. Now, why do you suppose this is emphasized so much in the Bible? Why the emphasis on hearing and doing? More like the man who looks at himself in the mirror, and you forget, you walk out the doors, and one day it's hard to even remember what you heard.

[17:45] Okay. Is that a New Testament problem? No, we saw it in Ezekiel's day, didn't we? We even see it in the garden, don't we?

Forgetting God's word under temptation. And has God really said? And pretty soon Eve's questioning. What did God say? And what did he mean?

So it's a common problem. And we would be foolish if we didn't address it and to think that, well, we're above this.

We don't have any tendencies toward just hearing and not putting it into practice. No, we would have to just say, we're not like the rest of mankind. So it's a common problem.

And so we need to think about this. It's impossible to put into practice God's word without listening to it. Right? So you can't do the word unless you know the word.

[18:45] But it is possible to hear the word without putting it into practice. And that's where we see this double emphasis of scripture. This is then, I would say, our major aim in trying these small groups for five times.

To give us help in doing what we're hearing. We're trying to balance out the emphasis upon doing to match up with the amount of hearing that we're doing.

Now, I shared this with someone, this aim for doing small groups, and later received this letter. Let me read it. I would personally welcome this for a while from the standpoint of being able to make better use of the input I receive each week.

I've been a bit overwhelmed with all the input lately, feeling like I'm not really making the best use of it. I feel like I'm getting a lot in, but it's not going very deep.

Between Sunday school, a.m. and p.m. service, Wednesday night, personal reading of the Bible, church memory verse, personal memory, family worship, and then trying to study the word and also read a good book every once in a while.

[20:00] I'm getting lots of input. But I wonder if less input with more meditation and application would be better.

Sometimes I feel like there's a lot of seed being planted in my heart, but I'm not taking the time to water, fertilize, weed, and it's not producing what it could in my life.

I'm looking forward to small groups from the standpoint of taking time to deepen the word we've already heard rather than taking more in. Now, I think this sums up our concern as well as aiming at a balance here.

We've already made some adjustments. We no longer have a Bible study on Wednesday night. We just have a brief word meant to encourage us to pray and how to pray, but it's prayer meeting.

We're here to avail ourselves of God's promise. Ask and you will receive. So we've pulled back on a full Bible study on Wednesday night. We also have as one of the prayer requests on Wednesday night to pray over the preached word.

[21:14] Again, trying to bring up once more to our memory. What was it that we heard three days ago? Let's pray that in now together as a church. So we've sought to make some progress that way, and these five Sunday evenings is along that same vein.

It is possible to take in too much too fast. What's wrong with drinking water from a fire hose? It comes in faster than you can swallow, right?

And it's also possible to put too much food into the mouth too fast, and it leads to swallowing without chewing. And that may be more food in, but perhaps less digestion, less assimilation, less overall health.

And if properly chewed and digested, I had an aunt that told me we're to chew our milk at least three times. So I think chewing is important. I'm not sure about that.

Meditation has been compared to chewing the cud, a cow chewing the cud. And the picture there is of taking in the grass and just chewing it and then swallowing it down and then burping it back up and chewing it some more to get all the nutrients out of that food.

[22 : 43] Well, David says, I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your word, on your statutes.

Psalms 119:99. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts. So there's more wisdom, more understanding.

And remember, wisdom is more than just head knowledge. It's more understanding of how to live in the light of that word. And that's what David is saying. The elders, the teachers, I can have more wisdom and understanding than them if I meditate on it.

Because I can take it further, perhaps, than what they're taking it. So it's important that we have time to meditate. And, of course, another metaphor is what was found in this letter of planting gobs of seed in the garden, but not just more than you can tend so you lose much of the harvest.

Better to plant a little bit less, perhaps, and give more time to watering, fertilizing, weeding, pruning, pollinating, and pest control, and all the rest, to the end that it might bear more fruit.

[23 : 56] So we don't want to create an environment at Grace Fellowship Church where we're all about intake of God's word without an equal concern for outliving and putting it into practice.

And that's what we're hoping to do in this experiment of small groups, to use them to that end. How do we hope to use small groups to help us grow more in doing the word?

Well, it'll give us more opportunity to do just what we said, to meditate together over that passage, over that lesson of what we've heard preached, and to do that together.

I won't ask you to put up your hands, but I wonder how many of you give further thought during the week to what you have heard on Sunday, and maybe the different ways you do that.

I remember one brother being very intentional about this and just curtailing his own Bible reading on Mondays, and instead he gets his notes out and he prays over what he heard the day before.

[25 : 03] I know another brother that says, when I go to work on Monday, that's what I share with others that I meet at work. Bringing up again. You see, it's that idea of meditating, bringing it before our eyes as well as before others.

Others may re-listen online or take a CD to listen in the car, but it's to think on it again. How can I put that into practice? And so these are helpful ways to lessen our likelihood of just walking away on Sundays and never giving another thought to what we've heard.

We want to identify things that need to change in light of what we've heard. Is there anything that I need to stop doing or start doing or to do more of or just to continue to do?

Those are the kinds of things. You know, as pastors preparing messages, we may spend much time during the week with a given text, praying it in and seeking to work it out and applying it in our lives.

We work with that passage for several days. And then we come and we let the dump truck down and we dump it on you in 40 minutes.

[26 : 19] And then you get another one. And not long after that, another one. And we're saying that can, you haven't had the time perhaps that we have to think through.

Okay, if that's true, how should I live in the light of that passage? We do some of that from the pulpit, but there's no way we can apply it to each and every one of you.

That's the work of the Spirit. And that's some of the benefit of each of you in these small groups sharing. How did the Word of God come up close to me and show me I need to believe that promise?

I need to rest in this attribute of God more. I need to. So that's the aim. Thinking together. How to apply the Word of God that we've heard.

So hopefully, if you know that's what's going to be happening on that Sunday evening, on the last of each month, you'll be a bit more proactive in your own thinking as you leave each Sunday and think, Now, what am I going to do about what I heard?

[27 : 27] And what will I have to share with the group as we've come together? Of anything over the past month that we've heard together as a body and how it's impacted me and what I have done with it.

That's for the encouragement of doing as well as hearing. So we hope that this will give us a couple more times in front of the Word of God, seeking to get it into our lives before leaving it and just going on to more input.

So our experiment of small groups is to balance this intake, then, of the Word with the outliving of it. Any questions, then, about aim number one?

Or comments? All right. Aim number two. We've got another aim. See if you can discern it. What's wrong with this picture? There's the congregation sitting under the preaching of the Word, hearing the things that we need to stop doing, start doing, keep doing, do more of, and then we go out and nothing changes.

Well, that's the error we've just been talking about, isn't it? But here's a second response. After hearing, we're all very determined. Yeah.

[28 : 42] Spirit of God brought something home to my heart. And we're very determined as we live. And we just go out and try harder to change in that area. Now, what's wrong with that? If that's all we do.

Come on. You're smiling. What's the smiles about? What's wrong with that? Shouldn't we be happy? After all, the aim is here and do. And we're going out determined to do.

Yeah, dear. Okay. We can't do it in our own strength. And even if in our strength we can do something that looks like positive change, what happens?

We can get discouraged. And who gets the praise? And who's proud? And who's able to say, wow, I did that?

But what I'm getting at is our second aim is to pray the word in. All right? So we've heard the word. We now want to pray over that word. And prayer is that language of dependence where we just come with empty hands and we say, Lord, I'm not to lean on my own understanding.

[29 : 54] I'm not to lean on my own resources. I'm to trust in you in all my ways. Why? I'm so often leaning on my own understanding and do it.

I need your help. And so we come with the empty hands and ask for help to trust him more. And then when he helps us, you see, we give him the praise.

Call on me in the day of trouble. I will deliver you. And you will honor me. You see? If we don't call on the Lord about our need from what we've heard, then even if the Lord delivers us, we won't be all that conscious of our weakness and need of him and just see what a precious thing it is that we asked and he answered.

So we honor him with praise. But when we pray over our needs and pray over the word that we've heard and we see the Lord helping us, well, then we give him the praise and the honor for what he's done for us through his word and by his spirit.

So that's another aim. It is my goal in preaching God's word to you to have that you might have personal dealings with God himself.

[31 : 17] My goal, and I'm not as conscious of it as I should be, but if I could, that would be my goal every time I step in the pulpit or before you in a lectern.

It would be that each one of you should have something to drive you to go have dealings with God. And to seek his face. And if that happens, it's a successful lesson.

It's a successful sermon, even if it's lacking in many areas. But if it doesn't happen, no matter how good the content, if it didn't get you to the Lord, it's failed.

And what I believe is its chief purpose is to get you before him. God has spoken to us in his word. He now waits for us to respond.

It's a relationship. It's not a dry book. It's a God speaking to us. His words, his thoughts, revealing his heart. And once he's revealed his heart to us, he's now waiting on us to respond to him.

[32 : 18] Whether it's praise for what we see of his attributes. Whether it's, Lord, help me for a command, a duty, a responsibility that I feel my need of help.

Or if it's a sin to confess. If it's a grace that's been given and to thank him for it. Whatever the word is, the aim is to get you before the Lord personally.

So that's where this matter of prayer comes in. We want to be praying as a response to God's word. God's spoken to us. We not only want to know how to practice God's word in very practical ways. We're wanting to facilitate greater doing. But we also want to seek his face. Not just dive in. But to seek his face. Again, Jeremiah 17, 5 to 10. Those who trust in the Lord are like that bush that's just fruitful all year round.

[33 : 25] But those who lean on themselves and trust in themselves, they're like that bush in the desert that's dry and dusty. We want to be full of life. And it's through prayer that God sends his spirit and enables us to do what he says.

So we want to pray it in that we might then work it out. And then another aim, thirdly, is just to grow in closer fellowship with one another. If we're doing the first two aims, I think this third aim will also be achieved.

If we are coming together to meditate together on God's word being applied in our lives, we're going to know each other better, aren't we?

If we're praying together for the application of God's word in our life and praying about things that the Lord is challenging us with and answering and praising him, we'll know each other better and we'll be better equipped to carry out the one another's that are found in the scriptures.

The shared life. That's what koinonia, fellowship, means. It's shared life. And so we're just simply wanting to throw fuel on fellowship that it might truly be a shared situation.

[34 : 45] So we bring our burdens to our small group and we pray. And it's a shared burden that becomes lighter then for the one in it. And we share our concerns how this word of God can be put into practice.

So those are the main aims. We've divided the congregation up somewhat geographically into five areas this time.

We may do it differently if we choose to do it again. But we have a group that will be meeting in Plymouth, one in the Lakeville area, one in Napanee, and two in Bremen. And so we've assigned, for this first time, we've assigned everyone a group so as to control the size of groups so we didn't just throw it open to anybody, go to whatever group they want.

There might be too many to be held in a small group. It would no longer be a small group. So for now, we're dividing it up to try to keep the groups of relatively equal size for the sake of the hosts and what's manageable for them.

We'll be meeting from the same time, 5 o'clock to 6 o'clock, in the same place each of those last Sundays of the month. And, yeah, you can stick around for an hour or so afterwards and fellowship some more.

[36 : 08] But we do want to give the host time to unwind on a busy Lord's Day, so we're not wanting to be there until midnight enjoying each other's fellowship. So just that, a word to the wise, is sufficient.

I'm going to put up sheets in the back listing the groups so you can check which one to attend. If you're not on the sheet, that's my fault. It was simply an oversight.

We want you to come, so just come. If that's you, just come to the one closest to you. We said, children, bring them along. We don't have any plan for them, but they can partake of the group even as you are.

So that's the plan. Starting July 29th, two weeks from this evening, will be our first small group meeting. And then every last Sunday of the month, again, I'll set those sheets out and back.

Are there any questions before we conclude? If you have any questions or concerns, please see either of your pastors or the leader of your group.

[37 : 13] We're wanting as many of you to partake and be involved in this as can. Let's pray together. Oh, Lord, in coming to you, we come to the one who is perfect in every way.

We are so often imbalanced, but you are perfect. There's no weakness or lacking in you. Lord Jesus, we find perfect balance in you of all these things that we've talked about.

And we do so much want to learn to walk in your ways, to hear them and then to walk in them, even to run in them. So please use these small groups to spur us on to doing all that you say.

Spur us on to praying together as a people that we might come as a body that is absolutely certain of one thing, that if God does not send his spirit, this word that we've heard will not bear fruit in our

lives.

All is vain unless the spirit of the Holy One comes down. And so teach us to pray and to pray together that heaven might be bombarded by grace fellowship for the spirit that you give in answer to those who ask.

[38 : 41] And then teach us this shared life more and more in our individualized society where everyone keeps to themselves. Lord, would you teach us that we are your family.

And as family, we have wonderful brothers and sisters to bear our burdens to, to pray with us, to help us, to serve us, for us to serve them.

Do lead us in these things. Do lead us in these things. To the end, Lord, that your name would be more and more uplifted. We would find great delight in you and in your word and in your people. We pray for Jesus' sake. Amen.