

LifeGroups 2.0—Compelled by Love

Introduction

- [Slide #1] On any given Sunday morning both newcomers and regular attenders alike show up here clueless as to what we're about as a church. If you are clueless, that's not your fault. That's my fault. The bulletin certainly isn't an appropriate gauge as to what is happening around here. Even being part of a LifeGroup is no guarantee you understand what we're trying to do. So here's the plan. For the rest of the summer, until Labor Day, I want to try to explain the next evolution of the LifeGroup thing. Think software for a second. We're moving out of the alpha stage to the beta stage. There are still bugs; this is still a work in progress. But things have progressed. A year after launching we're now at LifeGroups 2.0.
- If you are fairly new to the church let me say that these things we call LifeGroups are absolutely essential to what we're about as a church. Basically, LifeGroups are small clusters of people who love Jesus, who are committed to loving each other, and who want to love others into the Kingdom of God. LifeGroups are not about building a small group program. LifeGroups aren't even meant to be bible studies. LifeGroups are our way of living out the life of the church in response to the massive cultural shift that is taking place all around us.
- Let me say something about this cultural shift. Whether you realize it or not, most people you know think this thing called church is irrelevant. They still care about God. In fact, some recent research concludes 82% of people would like to talk with Christians about God and have their questions answered even if they disagree.¹ But the church? In their minds, God has gotten lost in this thing called church. They'll take God, but they've scrapped the church.
- In response to this cultural shift and the changing perceptions about church, Christians can react in a couple of different ways. One, we can do nothing. Business as usual. If that's what we do, the church will age, gray and die. Two, we can become "vendors of religious goods and services."² In other words, work harder to compete with the culture and produce a more attractive product than what the culture produces in order to draw people in. Or, third, compelled by love, Christians can find some way to send themselves into the world. It's this last option that LifeGroups 2.0 is all about. Listen to me. The church that loves will never be in danger of becoming irrelevant. That's what LifeGroups are about. That's what this summer is about. LifeGroups are the way we as a church are going to send ourselves, compelled by love, to a world in need.
- In the last year we've grown incredibly as a church in some intangible, hard to measure ways. Ways like biblical community. We're much better now at sharing life together, developing biblical community, meeting needs, than we were a year ago. I'm really proud of you. The relational connections that have formed this past year

¹ George Klippenes at EFCA National Conference 2009 quoting a 2007 study by *Lifeway Research*

² Alan Hirsch

because of the LifeGroups are wonderful. But that's not enough. Developing community is not enough.

Transition

Let me shift gears and make a statement that will set up the rest of what I hope to accomplish this summer. This week I want you to see and come to grips with just one thing. [Slide #2]

Big Idea

- **The mission Jesus launched is different than the "church"**
- Let me say that again and with all the brain power you can muster think about what I'm saying. **The mission Jesus launched is different than "church."**
- Most people think that if they are a part of a church, if they attend some building on Sunday morning, or in our case if they're part of a LifeGroup, then, by default, they are also on the mission Jesus started. And that is not necessarily the case. **The mission Jesus launched is different than the church.**
- If this statement is true, and I believe it is, then it begs three questions. What's the mission? Am I on it? And the hardest of all questions, but one that needs to be asked. If not, if I'm not on this mission, do I really understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus?
- See, I believe one of the reasons people increasingly see the church as irrelevant is because we mistakenly think if we're involved and connected as part of a church it automatically means we're on Jesus' mission. But that's just not the case. You can be integrally involved in this thing called church. You can attend every service, be a part of every class, serve on the elder board, go to every LifeGroup and have no part of the mission Jesus launched. And if we are not on the mission Jesus launched then it's no wonder at all that the world around thinks the church is irrelevant.
- Frankly, when I look at Jesus' life, what he did, how he lived, he really wasn't about church. Don't get me wrong. Jesus cared about the church—deeply. He died for the church. Paul says in Ephesians 5:25 *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her*. Woe to the person who belittles this thing called the "church"—the bride of Christ. As I read the whole of God's Word, nothing is more important than this thing called "church." Christ cared deeply about the church and we should too.
- But the high calling of the church in Scripture and the corresponding value we place on loving "the church" is different than Jesus' mission. Jesus wasn't about church. Jesus was about something bigger. He was about the Kingdom. And the two are different; they're not equal. **The mission Jesus launched is different than the church.**

Transition

I need you to see this from Scripture, from Jesus himself; that **the mission Jesus launched is different than the church**. Otherwise LifeGroups 2.0 will never happen.

Main Points

- The phrase used by the Gospel writers to summarize the mission Jesus launched is the phrase the *Kingdom of God*, or Matthew’s particular term for it, the *Kingdom of Heaven*. The *Kingdom of God*. *The Kingdom of Heaven*. Same thing. Jesus’ life and ministry was all about the Kingdom. Right? That phrase, the *Kingdom of God* or *Kingdom of Heaven*, appears about one hundred times in Matthew, Mark and Luke alone.³ By comparison, do you know how many times the word *church* appears in the Gospels? Twice. As in t-w-o. Two times. Once in Matthew 16:18, the *on this rock* passage, and once in Matthew 18:17 regarding church discipline. That’s it. The *Kingdom of God* presumes the existence of this thing called the church but the two are not entirely the same.
- Jesus began his ministry, he launched his mission with an announcement that some thing in particular had come—this thing called the Kingdom. Turn to Mark 1:14-15. Look at what Jesus says. [Slide #3] Mark 1:14-15. *Now after John had been taken into custody, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* What did Jesus inaugurate with his coming? The Kingdom. *The kingdom of God is at hand*. Jesus didn’t begin his public ministry by saying come to church. Be a part of the church. Jesus said something different than, bigger than the church. Jesus declared himself to be the bringer of the kingdom.⁴ **The mission Jesus launched is different than the church.**
- We see Jesus on his mission in Luke 4. [Slide #4] Turn to Luke 4:43-44. Look at the text and pay particular attention to the content of this mission. *But He said to them, "I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, for I was sent for this purpose." 44 So He kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.* This passage is key to understanding Jesus’ mission and his life and ministry. What is Jesus’ mission? For what reason does Jesus say he was sent to this world? Does Jesus say he was sent to establish churches? Does Jesus say his mission was to form committees and boards? Does Jesus say his mission was to establish a place where people sit and listen to sermons and sing songs? What does he say? He says his purpose, his mission, was to announce the *kingdom of God*. The message about the Kingdom was the central feature of Jesus' teaching. He came teaching the **kingdom of God**.
- We see Jesus doing just this in Luke 8:1. [Slide #5] Flip ahead a few chapters to Luke 8:1. Luke editorializes and adds this comment about Jesus’ ministry. *After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God.*
- Jesus’ kingdom message was that, with his coming, something new had happened that hadn’t before happened in the history of the world. That God’s plan of redemption to bring about a new creation had been kick started. That the kingdom depicted in Eden, which was lost, was about to be restored. That God had broken into history through the God-man Jesus Christ to reclaim and reestablish this lost kingdom. That the way into the kingdom was to *repent and believe in the gospel* as we already read in Mark

³ *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 615.

⁴ *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 616.

1:14-15. That, ultimately and finally, the fullness of this kingdom would one day be realized when God establishes a new people of God in fellowship with him in a new Eden, a new Jerusalem, a new heaven and earth.⁵ And all of this, all of what Jesus was about, his mission in life, in death, in resurrection, was broader than, wider than this thing called church.

Transition

I need you to see something else. This mission wasn't just Jesus' alone. [Slide #6]

- Turn to Luke 9:1-2. *When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to preach the kingdom of God.* Jesus sent out the Twelve to carry on this same mission. There is nothing in Jesus' instructions here to the Twelve about the establishment of the "church", living as part of the church. Why? Because they're different.
- A chapter later, in chapter 9, we see the mission expand beyond the 12 to the 72 and by default to all of us, all those who call themselves his followers. [Slide #7] Turn to Luke 10:1-12. Look at how Jesus instructs them to live. *After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road. 5 "When you enter a house, first say, 'Peace to this house.' 6 If a man of peace is there, your peace will rest on him; if not, it will return to you. 7 Stay in that house, eating and drinking whatever they give you, for the worker deserves his wages. Do not move around from house to house. 8 "When you enter a town and are welcomed, eat what is set before you. 9 Heal the sick who are there and tell them, 'The kingdom of God is near you.' 10 But when you enter a town and are not welcomed, go into its streets and say, 11 'Even the dust of your town that sticks to our feet we wipe off against you. Yet be sure of this: The kingdom of God is near.' 12 I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.*
- Jesus and his followers aren't just "doing evangelism"—whatever that means. The implication from this passage is that Jesus' mission, the mission he started, is a way of life passed he passed on to his followers. By the way, that's a great description of what it means to be a Christian; a follower of Jesus is a person who, by faith, carries out Jesus' mission.
- Do you remember the name of the movement that resulted from Jesus' followers carrying out his mission? Remember Acts 19:9? The movement was called *the Way*. *But some of them became obstinate; they refused to believe and publicly maligned the Way.* The way of what? Sitting around listening to sermons? Sitting around singing songs? Is all that what Jesus passed on to his followers? Is that what causes this great disturbance in Acts 19:23? *About that time there arose a great disturbance about the Way.* There was this great disturbance in the city of Ephesus because Jesus' followers carried on and lived out Luke 10, the mission Jesus started. No matter how

⁵ *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, p. 620.

you slice it Jesus' life and the life of his early followers, their lives were more about the mission Jesus started than "church."

- To be absolutely fair, the kingdom and church aren't mutually exclusive—totally separate. There is some overlap. Author [Ed Stetzer](#) says it like this. "The Kingdom of God births the church in its wake."⁶ Get that picture in your mind. "The Kingdom of God births the church in its wake."
- In other words, the church is a byproduct of Jesus' mission. So, to be absolutely fair, the two, Jesus' mission and the church, aren't totally different. There is some overlap. Wherever followers of Jesus carry out the mission of Jesus, carry out *the Way*, what's left behind are ongoing, organized communities of people who have submitted to Jesus' rule. What's left behind is the church. Carrying out the one produces the other. But they aren't exactly the same. **The mission Jesus launched is not the same thing as "church."** The two are different.
- LifeGroups 2.0 is about the collision of worlds. What would happen if "church" and the mission Jesus launched more naturally came together? See, Jesus started with the mission and from that sprung the church. We're in the opposite position. We've got twenty centuries of this thing called church with little pockets, with occasional blips here and there of his followers living out his mission. What if that were different? What if the way we organized, if the way we lived out this thing called "the church" made it easier, more natural for all of Jesus' followers to live *the Way*, to be engaged in Jesus' mission.
- LifeGroups 1.0 was about living out more faithfully the idea of church as it's described in the New Testament. Love one another.⁷ Submit to one another.⁸ Be at peace with one another.⁹ Don't grumble against one another.¹⁰ Serve one another.¹¹ Encourage one another.¹² Accept one another.¹³ Don't judge one another.¹⁴ Instruct one another.¹⁵ Be patient with one another.¹⁶ Speak truthfully to one another.¹⁷ Don't envy one another.¹⁸ Be kind to one another.¹⁹ Confess your sins to one another.²⁰
- LifeGroups 2.0 is about living out *the Way*, the mission of Jesus. See, I believe one of the reasons outsiders increasingly see the church as irrelevant is because all they

⁶ Ed Stetzer, *Exponential Conference*, April 2009.

⁷ John 13:34-35

⁸ Ephesians 5:21

⁹ Romans 12:15-16

¹⁰ James 5:9

¹¹ Galatians 5:13

¹² 1 Thessalonians 5:11

¹³ Romans 15:7

¹⁴ Romans 14:13

¹⁵ Romans 15:14

¹⁶ Ephesians 4:2

¹⁷ Ephesians 4:25

¹⁸ Galatians 5:26

¹⁹ Ephesians 4:32

²⁰ James 5:16

see us doing is church. They need to see us living *the Way*. Are you living *the Way*? Are you living out Jesus' mission?

- My only goal this morning is to accomplish one thing and one thing. I need you to come to the realization that **the mission Jesus launched is not the same thing as “church”** and that, maybe, just maybe, you might not be on that mission. Most people think that if they are a part of a church, if they attend some building on Sunday morning, if they're part of a LifeGroup, then, by default, they are also on the mission Jesus started. And that is not necessarily the case. I need every one of you, individually, to get serious about the mission. Those under twenty. Those over 65. Those with young children. Singles. Children. Young marrieds. Empty nesters. And everybody in between. Jesus' mission is your mission.
- Starting next week and for the rest of the summer we're going to talk a whole lot more about what this mission is. This summer I really want you to wrestle with and think about and pray about what it would look like for you to carry on and live out the mission Jesus launched.

Conclusion

- Remember the letters to the seven churches in Revelation? Those letters are a shocking reminder that it is in the realm of possibility for a church to codify, to become comfortable, to stagnate, to lose sight of and fail to carry out the mission of Jesus.
- *"To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands: 2 I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. 3 You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. 4 Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. 5 Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place.*
- *"To the angel of the church in Sardis write: These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up! Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you.*
- **The mission Jesus launched is different than the “church.”** Let's pray.