

# St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups May 31st 2009

## More love, more power! Holy Living:- Empowering small groups Acts 2: 1-8 & 12-21 and Ephesians 4: 14-16

Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon



The first church small group emerged at Pentecost! The disciples experienced the Holy Spirit's power and became like new people, they spiritually grew up – see Eph 4:14. Becoming spiritually mature, and helping others to do so, is a vital component of small group life. But even if we've been a Christian for a long time, there is always something more to discover about God. Read 1 Peter 2:2-5 & 9.

Bishop Tom Wright in *Paul for Everyone* says, *without maturity Christians are very, very vulnerable to all kinds of trickery...babies, a boat being tossed about on a stormy sea, and cunning tricksters gambling with loaded dice... We should be as anxious as Paul was that any younger Christians in our care should grow up...recognize such trickery and resist it.*

A key part of what we do together in small groups is to study God's word and look at its application for our lives. St Paul is in no doubt how important this is: Look at Eph 6. We need solid teaching from Scripture and wise application for our complex lives. We need to ask God's Spirit to help this wisdom take root and transform how we live. Those who are older Christians need to guide and disciple those who are younger.

Another transformation will occur if the Holy Spirit is active in our small-group prayer and worship. This has always been an important part of our groups. If we go back to Pentecost, we see that the small group of disciples were waiting for the Holy Spirit. We also need to expect the Holy Spirit to come to us in power – but do we always actually ask Him to come when we sit down to meet at our small groups? In *The Responsive Church* (Tomlin and Spencer) we read, *The Spirit is given to dwell within us in a way that we are meant to notice... The Spirit brings spiritually lifeless hearts, unresponsive to the love and glory of their creator, into an intimate relationship with the Father.*

The gift of tongues was a clear sign of the Spirit's work, as prophesied by Joel. Look at Acts 2:17. We should expect God to give us spiritual gifts and small groups are the best place to practise praying in tongues and interpretation, or prophesy, or to pray for gifts of healing and any other miracles that God lays on our hearts.

The 4th key area of small group life that we can re-vitalise through the Holy Spirit is our relationships with each other. Look at Ephesians 4:15. *Speak the truth to each other in love.* Love between small group members will not always be easy or natural: we are all very different and some of us are distinctly odd! But we are not just a club; we can and should ask the Holy Spirit to help us to love others. We won't always agree; we may have to say we think someone else might have things wrong. But if we genuinely speak in love, such accountability will help us to mature in our faith. Dependency is part of God's plan, it is part of who God is. Jesus chose to become completely dependant, firstly on a mother, on his companions, and finally he was dependant on the authorities. So for us to be dependant on each other is not weakness, it's all part of God's plan. And honest, trusting, dependant relationships in a small group will model God's plans and purposes in a real and wonderful way.

When the Holy Spirit is present and active in our small groups we should experience *a dynamism that multiplies our feeble attempts to witness and an effective engagement with those on a spiritual search* (Tomlin and Spencer). The disciples were given the ability to speak the languages of those around them, and we need to learn to speak in a way that those outside the church can understand. Often that means *doing* rather than *talking*. The Holy Spirit moved the disciples out of their room – when Peter addressed the crowd, he was out on the streets, where they were. As small groups we too need to get out of the room! Peter was not just a reasonably effective witness, he was transformed by the Holy Spirit into a bold leader with tremendous gifts of oratory and evangelism.

Our aim as small groups and as a church is that we *grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ*. Through the Holy Spirit's powerful presence in our small groups our Bible-study, our use of spiritual gifts, our worship and prayer, our relationships and our witness can be renewed and transformed.

### Witness: questions to discuss:

Spend some time asking for God's Holy Spirit to inspire your study, worship and prayer tonight.

1. What do you remember about being a "baby" Christian? How has your faith developed; how have you changed? What or who were the main influences for this change?
2. Share examples of where God has helped you to change how you feel about someone whom you found difficult.
3. John Stott has written\*, "*Some of us are too conservative, too complacent, too ready to acquiesce in the present situation and resist change. Others are too radical...*" Where do you think you and your small-group fit? What are the implications of this?
4. How might you encourage the practice of spiritual gifts in your group? How might we incorporate them more into our Sunday worship – should we even try?
5. In what ways might the members of your group hold each other accountable? How do you feel about being dependant on one another?
6. What might be the result if you felt a dynamism about your witness?
7. How can we encourage those not in small groups to join one?

\*John Stott Bible Studies, *Ephesians*