

RANSOMED
HEART
ministries

February 2009

Dear Friends,

One of the most common questions we are asked here at Ransomed Heart is, “What do you do for church?”

Sometimes the question is posed as a sort of test – somewhere, somebody got the idea we are opposed to church. Not at all – we love the Church with a capital C, the people of God, the body of Christ. We also believe in church with a small c; we attend church and we encourage others to do so. But where, when, *how* – I think that is behind the question when most people ask it. The question reveals a dilemma for the asker; a dilemma I think many people share. It is something we have wrestled with ourselves. What is church supposed to look like? Where do we find the kind of fellowship church was meant to provide?

The question usually comes following a re-alignment.

When we turn to God from the heart, seeking to recover our first Love, we awaken to the Gospel as a romance. Not a set of principles to be mastered, not a roster of programs to get involved in. First and foremost, the Gospel is a love affair with God. What a wonderful revelation; it opens up a whole new world before us. We soon discover that the heart is absolutely vital to the Christian life – the heart of God, and our heart, too. We begin to taste a bit of what Jesus meant when he said he came to give us life.

A second revelation usually follows hard on the heels of the first – that we live in a spiritual war. Anyone seeking to know God deeply and truly suddenly finds that the romance is opposed; we have an enemy.

Which leads us to wonder, “Where will I find allies? Who can I take this journey with?”

The dilemma is that what you get when you walk into a church depends on what they believe the Gospel is. There are many “gospels” being preached out there (as there was in Paul’s day) and they are not all the same. Many churches do not make the heart central, do not believe in warfare, do not see the Gospel as a romance. They do not actually teach people how to be intimate with God, or hear his voice. When you set those things aside, you have to replace them with something – typically busyness, programs, “right doctrine,” social service. Good things, but take the heart out of them and it becomes soul-killing. Intimacy with God is not promoted; most folks don’t know how to find it.

We’ve spoken to a number of good people, mature believers who sincerely love God and dearly want to join him in his battle for this world, but who have found church to be an exercise in frustration. The number of these folks continues to grow; it is a very significant trend. These are not simply malcontents, who really just want to sleep in on Sundays. These are sincere followers of Jesus and they *want* a genuine place of church; they just don’t know where to find it.

So they ask us, “What do you do?”

Let me first say what we *have* done – we have been a part of many different church expressions, from liturgical to conservative Bible to charismatic. And we have benefited richly from all of them. God can

be found in many different expressions of “church.” Most recently we have found the house church model to be particularly focused on what we believe are a few of the absolute essentials. Whatever else church might be, you *must* have a small fellowship to walk with.

Read the various urgings toward “church” in the epistles, and ask yourself, “How could this take place in an hour on Sunday morning in a group of 500 or 5,000? How can you pray for one another, specifically? How can you encourage one another, really? Bear one another’s burdens?” It can be a rich experience to worship with a large group of people, and hear the word of God taught by a gifted pastor. But there is simply no way that the fellowship urged in the Scriptures can be expressed without involvement in a small group. Look at Jesus – he had an intimate fellowship in the twelve (and even more intimate in the three).

Here is what we have done in our home fellowships; we share it by way of suggestion towards something we have found to be very, very rich and true. First, we worship, usually at the beginning. If someone is musically gifted, wonderful. We use CDs.

We want to know one another, so we tell our stories. Let each person in your group have an evening to talk about their life. It will be remarkable; you will understand why they are where they are, and how to help them along in their walk with God.

We pray for one another, and minister the “four streams” to each other (discipleship, healing, deliverance, and counseling). We share the sacraments. We hear the word of God, either by someone teaching or by video or audio or webcast. And, we play together – go out to dinner, throw a birthday party, watch a movie, have fun. Spiritual doesn’t mean heavy.

Call it a home fellowship, friendship group, Bible study, small group, house church, whatever – you cannot live the Christian life without some close allies. This must come first. Yes, it can be hard to find. Pray. Ask God to lead you to the people who want what you want. And then – initiate! Start a group!!

We are developing new small group/home fellowship DVD materials this year. Already available are *Walking with God*, *Epic*, *Band of Brothers* (for men) and *Heart to Heart* (for women). As a way of encouraging you to lead a small group we are offering these four small group DVD series for **30% off** our regular prices. You can check out these deals at www.ransomedheart.com or use the enclosed insert to place your order. This offer is good through March 15th. Many groups also use our audio teachings as well.

The Battle is heating up, dear friends; you do not want to walk alone.

From your friends in Colorado,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be the initials 'John' in a cursive style.

John