

Spiritual Formation: Corporate Gatherings

Part One of a Three Part Series

Thesis: The Lord uses corporate gatherings to change us and to form us spiritually and emotionally. Today, I want to share how the Lord has used corporate gatherings to change me. And, I want us to consider some ways that we can show up which will help us experience the Lord and his life-changing presence.

This message is the first of a three-part series on Spiritual Formation. In this series, we will look at some of the practices which the Lord uses to form us spiritually and to change our lives.

Corporate Gatherings

Let me begin by explaining what I mean by corporate gatherings. I mean anytime we get together with others as a part of following the Lord. Here is a list of corporate gatherings which I am talking about; however, this list is not exhaustive: worship services, corporate prayer times, small group meetings, missional community gatherings, etc. These corporate gatherings can be within our church or outside of our congregation.

We have a three-part vision at Calvary. Our vision is also a mental model of transformation-- the way the Lord forms us spiritually and emotionally.

Experiencing True Christian Community

1. **Community is the nature of who God is.**
 - a. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit live in eternal communion and oneness.
 - b. Our Triune God is community.
2. **We are made to connect deeply with the Lord and with others.**
 - a. **Belonging:** it is a deep, human need. We are created to do life together.
 - i. *The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Genesis 2:18).*
 - b. **Interdependence:** we need each other and can do more together than we can do alone (1 Corinthians 12:12-27). We are designed to do life together.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. 13 For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body—

whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 14 Now the body is not made up of one part but of many. 15 If the foot should say, “Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 16 And if the ear should say, “Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,” it would not for that reason cease to be part of the body. 17 If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be? 18 But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. 19 If they were all one part, where would the body be? 20 As it is, there are many parts, but one body. 21 The eye cannot say to the hand, “I don’t need you!” And the head cannot say to the feet, “I don’t need you!” 22 On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, 23 and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, 24 while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, 25 so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 26 If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 27 Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.

- c. **Love:** it is the defining virtue of who we are and how we are meant to live as humans (Matthew 22:37-39). **Love is our motive, our means, and our vision** to do life together.

3. Jesus puts us into committed communities.

- a. Jesus called his disciples to follow him, and they followed him as a company of committed followers (Matthew 4:19).
- b. Jesus sends us out to live missionally in community.
 - i. Jesus sent out his disciples in groups (Luke 9 and 10).
 - ii. Jesus said, “I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). Part of our identity and mission involves advancing collectively against the kingdom of darkness and plundering the enemy’s camp.
 - iii. Teams formed the first missional efforts in Acts.
- c. Jesus puts us into local congregations called churches.

- i. Each local congregation is unique in its identity, gifting, and expression of the nature of the Lord in a given community and to the world.
 - ii. These local churches are committed communities that display what it is like to live according to the kingdom of God. They are outposts of the kingdom of God. And, they are on display for all the world to see.
4. **The Lord uses community as one of his primary ways to transform us.**
 - a. We believe that the Lord uses a holistic model to change us: intimacy, community, and kingdom.
 - i. *Establishing people in intimacy with God:* This is the reflective life, where we learn to hear the voice of God and co-create with him. Awareness.
 - ii. *Expressing true Christian community:* This is where learn how to grow in authenticity in order to live a shared life on a shared mission. Authenticity.
 - iii. *Extending the kingdom of God in the earth:* This is where we grow in radical obedience in partnering with the Lord on his mission; and we live missionally in community, not as isolated individuals. Action.
 - b. **A transformed life intentionally engages a mental model of transformation.** I believe that the Lord uses all three parts of our vision to transform our lives. (Mental model: how you see the world and how you understand how the world works.)
 - i. **Intimacy:** a **reflective lifestyle** where we listen to God and give our word to what he is doing to redeem and restore people, systems, and institutions to their redemptive calling; **we become more aware**
 - ii. **Community:** an **authentic community** of shared lives that leads to shared vision; **we grow in our capacity to be authentic** (open and honest)
 - iii. **Kingdom: radical obedience** which leads to a missional life (on mission with Jesus); **we get in action by taking next steps;** wherever we are **working for wholeness is missional.**
 - c. **Experiencing true Christian community**, where we have a shared vision and shared life together, **is a primary tool of transformation which the Lord uses in our lives.**
 - i. To change us (1 John 1:7)
 - ii. To heal us (James 5:13-16)
 - iii. To develop virtue and character in us (see an example in Colossians 3:1-17)

- iv. To realize our full potential: growing into fullness in Christ (Ephesians 3:14-19; 4:11-13)
- v. To teach us how to stand up and fight (Psalm 110:3; 2 Timothy 2:4; Ephesians 6:10-18)
- vi. To show us how to possess our inheritance (Joshua 1:1-11; Ephesians 1:17-23)
- vii. Etc. (The above list is indicative, but not exhaustive, of how the Lord uses community to change us.)

The Lord has used corporate gatherings to change me.

1. Worship Services
2. Corporate Prayer Times
3. Small Group Meetings
4. Missional Community Gatherings
5. Other corporate gatherings
6. Note: These corporate gatherings can be within our church or outside of our congregation.

Testimony

I want to share a recent example of how the Lord used corporate gatherings to change me and develop new skills in me for partnering with him on his mission.

Here are some ways that we can show up in corporate gatherings which will help us experience the Lord and his life-changing presence.

First, I think we need to keep in mind “the why” we gather corporately.

The Why of corporate worship gatherings

1. **Worship:**
 - a. *True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks (John 4:23).*
 - b. **“It is God who seeks, draws, persuades. Worship is the human response to the divine initiative”** (Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline. Page 158. Harper Collins, Inc. Kindle Edition.).

- c. We come before the Lord to stand, serve, minister, and burn (2 Chronicles 29:11), to meet with the Lord together, and to be a corporate habitation where the Lord dwells and feels at home (Ephesians 2:19-22).

2. **Encounter:**

“A striking feature of worship in the Bible is that people gathered in what we could only call a ‘holy expectancy.’ They believed they would actually hear the Kol Yahweh, the voice of God. When Moses went into the Tabernacle, he knew he was entering the presence of God. The same was true of the early Church. It was not surprising to them that the building in which they met shook with the power of God. It had happened before (Acts 2:2, 4:31). When some dropped dead and others were raised from the dead by the word of the Lord, the people knew that God was in their midst (Acts 5:1–11, 9:36–43, 20:7–10). As those early believers gathered they were keenly aware that the veil had been ripped in two, and, like Moses and Aaron, they were entering the Holy of Holies. No intermediaries were needed. They were coming into the awful, glorious, gracious presence of the living God. They gathered with anticipation, knowing that Christ was present among them and would teach them and touch them with his living power” (Foster, Richard J. Celebration of Discipline. Pages 161-162. Harper Collins, Inc. Kindle Edition).

3. **Equipping:** We gather to get trained in how to follow the Lord and to live a fully human, fully alive life (Ephesians 4:11-13 NASB)

4. **Impartation:**

- a. We gather to receive inspiration and impartation, to hear the current wind words of the Spirit and to get aligned, to get encouraged, and to receive exhortation (challenged).
- b. *I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong-- 12 that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith (Romans 1:11-12).*

5. **Ministry:**

- a. We gather to use our gifts to serve one another; to give and receive ministry.
- b. *Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (1 Peter 4:10).*

6. **Partnership:**

- a. We were designed to do life together with others in authenticity, mutual accountability, and support.
- b. “The second reason God wants us to be transparent with others is simply that when we look at the life of Jesus and at the early church, the

context for disciple-making and the prescription for staying aligned with God's design of us was always relationships. Jesus lived with those he was discipling. In the early church, they met together every day. The art of living in community has been lost in so many ways. And yet the Bible is clear: in order for us to experience transformation and to have unhindered fellowship both with God and with others, we are called to confess our sins to one another, to receive correction from one another, and to listen for God's prophetic word spoken through one another (James 5:16; John 1:17-19; Galatians 6:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:20)" (Faithwalking 101 manual).

7. **Mission:** We are collectively and individually called to join the Lord in what he is doing (Matthew 4:19-23; 6:10; 9:35-38; 28:18-20; Acts 1:8).

How I show up for corporate gatherings

1. **Remembering the why we gather**
 - a. To seek the Lord, to worship the Lord, to meet with the Lord, and to minister to him (John 4:23; Chronicles 29:11; Revelation 4 – 5).
 - b. *True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks (John 4:23).*
2. **Stirring my expectation to encounter the Lord and to engage deeply with others:** preparing my heart to meet with the Lord and paying attention to what the Lord is saying to and doing in others and me
3. **Coming as a learner:** looking for ways to grow, change, and get equipped
4. **Expecting to receive some impartation from the Lord and other**
 - a. I come to corporate gatherings expecting to hear the Lord and to experience his presence.
 - b. I listen to the Lord, practice sharing what the Lord is showing me, and get confirmation on how and what the Lord is saying and doing. That is one way have grown in the prophetic. In corporate gatherings, I have learned how the Lord speaks to me.
5. **Looking for opportunities to use my gifts to minister to others and to receive ministry**
 - a. Ministry for me started with raw obedience, just doing what the Lord said to do or what my spiritual leaders said to do. And, I saw God touch people with healing, salvation, deliverance, and encouragement.
 - b. Practice does not make perfect. Practice makes progress. Progress is made in public. Public practice is imperfect.
 - c. So, as you practice in public, you will learn how the Lord uses you and how he uses others to minister to you.

6. **Practicing being authentic** (vulnerable and honest)

a. **Walking in the light**

- i. *But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:7-9).*
- ii. Benefits of walking in the light:
 1. Fellowship, community, intimacy with one another
 2. Change: cleansing and purifying from all sin
- iii. Transformation conversation
 1. Clear
 2. Authentic
 3. Passionate
- iv. We need to be a safe place and we need to create safe places where people can be authentic. That means:
 1. No judging
 2. No fixing
 3. No controlling
 4. Listening, dialoguing, and responding by praying
- v. Learned skill: by practicing authenticity, we are transformed and healed. Through regular authenticity, vows and sins are disempowered.

b. **Talking with others about the places where we fall short**

- i. *Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (James 5:16).*
- ii. *Make this your common practice: Confess your sins to each other and pray for each other **so that you can live together whole and healed**. The prayer of a person living right with God is something powerful to be reckoned with (James 5:16 MSG).*
- iii. *Hamartia*: a sin, a failure; can mean a shortcoming.
 1. This is my current reality. This is my preferred future. I confess where I am and where I want to be.
 2. Chata in the Old Testament means “to miss the mark,” as does the Greek *hamartia*. The word could be used to describe a person shooting a bow and arrow and missing the target with the arrow. When it is used to describe sin, it means that the person has missed the

mark that God has established for the person's life
(Holman Bible Dictionary).

7. **Looking for ways to get in action missionally with the Lord and others**
 - a. There is multiplied power and fruitfulness when we get in action with others around what the Lord is saying and doing.
 - b. We were created to do life and mission together with the Lord and with others.
 - c. I cast vision or I listen to others cast vision, and I look for partnerships and shared vision.