

SIMPLE CHURCH LEADER

Thoughts from John White and Tom Wymore
July 20, 2007

John White says:

In order to define "leader" you must first define "church." My starting point is that God's heart is for family. (Probably that's why Jesus used the word "Father" so much.) So a house church is really an extended spiritual family. Roger Gehring (*House Church and Mission*) believes that the clear message of the New Testament is that church (*ekklesia*) happened in the context of household (*oikos*). Marvin Wilson (*Our Father Abraham*, pp. 214-217) shows that in Hebraic thinking the home (and not the synagogue) was always the center of spiritual life. Wilson notes that the home was referred to by post-exile rabbis as a *miqdash me'at* (little sanctuary/temple), and that the home was therefore to be set aside for special purposes related to the spiritual life of the family.

From this understanding of church it follows that house church leaders function as spiritual moms and dads. All of the things that go into making really great parents are the things that make great house church leaders. You can make a long list of these things: they are spiritual grownups themselves; they carry the family members in their hearts; they understand that family is not just a meeting but 24/7 relationships; their goal is for the members to grow up into maturity (and, therefore, they move to coaching and facilitating as soon as possible), etc.

Tom adds:

Larry Kreider, in *House Church Networks*, shares the conviction that leaders in a simple/house church function like spiritual parents. "Each church is led ... by a spiritual father or mother who functions as the elder ... for the little church. He or she does not simply lead a meeting in the house, but rather provides an environment for people to grow spiritually in the context of everyday life." (page 11). Although some might question Larry's reference to a "small eldership," there is no doubt that the qualifications for an elder as described in the New Testament are indeed a good description of what is required for a healthy house church leader. Perhaps that is why the apostle Paul says that an overseer/elder must be "one who manages his own household (*oikos*) competently" because "if anyone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of God's church?" (1 Timothy 3:4-5 HCSB). Another great place to see how a simple church leader should function is Paul's address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:17-38. There it is clear that the house church leaders were to lead in community, keeping watch on themselves and the "flock" and to shepherd God's people. It is significant, I think, that the leaders in this passage are described as elders (v. 17) and overseers (v. 28) who are to "shepherd" God's people (v. 28). This seems like a wonderfully complete description of their role!

John White has also said that a simple church leader needs to function as an overseer in the church meetings. Note that we do not mean overseer in terms of control or oversight in the traditional use of this word. Rather we mean someone who is able to "look over" the group and see what God is up to and help the group to follow the Holy Spirit's leading together. This means that s/he must be able to discern what is happening with the entire group, hear the Holy Spirit's direction for the group and help the group discover that. In my opinion, the group leader should usually not talk much in the meetings ("teaching a Bible study" in the traditional understanding of things) but rather be someone who leads the group to discovery as to what God is saying both in His word and through the revelatory gifts of the Spirit.

When a SC leader trains people, it is by example and demonstration and based on the dialogical teaching method used by Jesus and Paul. The best leaders/"teachers" are facilitators of discovery and people who adapt their training style to their audience. Their goal is to get those they train to hear and obey God. (This is certainly how Paul trained his leaders—see, for example, 1 Corinthians 4:16-17 and 1 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

Obviously, we could write a great deal more about this, but perhaps this is a start. Obviously, the leader of a "vibrant family of Jesus" (the Dawn definition of a simple church) must have a vibrant and intimate relationship with Jesus him/herself and must be allowing that vibrancy to affect every area of his/her life. And one who is "being parented" by our Father is one who can become a parent to others!

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