

# Chapter 7



## The Meeting of the Ekklesia Part 1

What goes on when you gather together in the living room? We're going to take our time with this subject of the meeting of the Ekklesia, and we're going to do it in this chapter and the following two chapters. This is the Meeting of the Ekklesia Part One.

Believers met in homes in the New Testament. The Ekklesia was a home gathering. We call it home congregation. In the 1st century, in fact, up through the 3rd century to the beginning of the 4th century, the Ekklesia met primarily in homes. There were no church buildings.

## In The Beginning...



It may be a surprise to you to discover that the Ekklesia meeting in homes today is not a brand new strategy.

It is actually a return to the original model.

It is a return to the First Century Model.

Not until the Fourth Century did Believers begin to meet inside temple-type buildings.

Even today, globally, more Christians meet in homes than meet in large buildings.

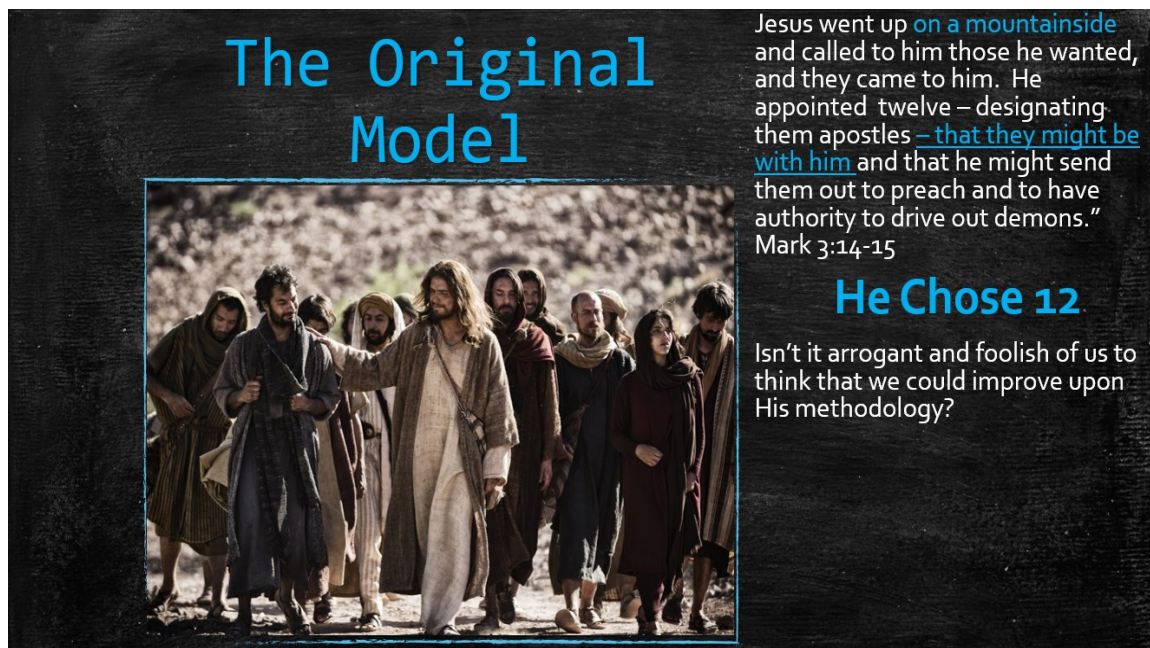
There wasn't even a church on earth until about 400 AD. In the 4th century, 325 AD, after Jesus left the face of the world, all the disciples were martyred. Before there was any-

thing that was called a church building, believers met primarily in homes. Now, I said primarily because they also met in other larger gatherings for Apostolic training and *equipping*.

You'll see in the first part of the book of Acts that they met in Solomon's Porch. Some of the translations say Solomon's Portico. This was part of the temple. They met in Solomon's Portico until the time of Acts Chapter 8 when all the Christians were scattered throughout the land, and they were no longer in Jerusalem. Later on, in the book of Acts, Paul meets with some believers in a rented Hall. In chapter 11, a whole section talks about Apostolic training and *equipping*.

Primarily believers met in houses. At times they met in other places, like a gathering place in a community. In today's world, it would be places like a community Hall. A restaurant or a coffee shop, or maybe at a park bench. At a picnic table or a pavilion in a park. They held similar gatherings in the New Testament that the Ekklesia or Home Congregations have today.

This is the model that Jesus started. This is what He said to his disciples: follow Me. This is what Jesus instituted. You see him meeting with the disciples



in an upper room and having a meal with them. That was an Ekklesia meeting. It might be a surprise to you to discover that the Ekklesia

meeting in homes today is a familiar strategy. You might think this is another fad, like cell groups or some new church growth strategy. What we are talking about here is nothing new.

This is a restoration of the original plan. It's a return to the beginning. It's a return to the original model that Jesus established with the disciples when he told them to follow Me. This is what he did. This is a return to the 1<sup>st</sup>-century model that Jesus inaugurated. It wasn't until the 4th century that believers began to meet in and be identified with other buildings that we would call church buildings. The 4th century was when the word church became associated with Christians and meetings in temple-type buildings, the auditorium-type building.

If you did a worldwide survey today, asking believers where they gather, you would discover that more Christians meet in homes and small groups than in all the large buildings. I know that it is hard to believe. Suppose you took all the mega-church arches in America, all the mega-churches in South Korea, and other places and added their attendance. In that case, more people meet in homes weekly for worship, prayer, Bible study, or Ekklesia. More meet in homes than in large mega-church buildings.

It's not an either-or like either meet in a large building or a home congregation. We see some of both in the New Testament. Here are a couple of illustrations of that. One

## Not "Either/Or" But "Both/And"



"Every day they continued to meet together **in the temple courts**. They broke bread **in their homes** and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." Acts 2:46

"You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you **publicly** and from **house to house**." Acts 20:20

trations of that. One is Acts 2:46. It says, "Every day, they continued to meet in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." The second one is Acts

20:20: "You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but has taught you publicly and from house to house."

The first one talks about Solomon's Porch. They met in the south temple courts, that's Solomon's Porch. It is a veranda area of the temple where believers would gather and meet with the disciples. In the second one, Acts 20:20, Paul talks to the Ephesian elders he joined in a rented hall called Tyrannus' Hall. It's probably something like a library building or the rented catering halls we have today. Paul rented it and met there with them for more Apostolic training and equipping. This is like what OKM does in its online Sunday morning meeting. We call it Equipping Ekklesia. This online meeting is open to the public. It's not an Ekklesia meeting but an opportunity to do just what the title suggests, to Equip the Ekklesia.

As I said earlier, this is the original model. It's not some new program, not some new church growth strategy; it's a return to what Jesus did. Look at Mark 3:14 – 15. Jesus went up to a mountain side and called

## The Original Model



Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve – designating them apostles – that they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and to have authority to drive out demons.” Mark 3:14-15

### He Chose 12

Isn't it arrogant and foolish of us to think that we could improve upon His methodology?

to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed 12 and designated them, Apostles. That they might be with him and that he might send them out to preach and have the authority to drive out demons.

This is the model that Jesus instituted when he said, follow Me. When he said this, he meant watch what I do, and then you do the same thing. He called them to be with Him. We can see that initially, the fundamental foundational principle of Jesus' ministry was a relationship, not a program, not building, or none of that; it was a relationship. He called them to be with Him, to spend time together.

They hung out together. You can read in the Gospels that they went fishing together, camping together on the mountainside, and picking corn together. They entertained each other in one another's homes. They wanted to spend time together. That's different from an hour and a half or two hours on Sunday morning in the auditorium, watching the show on the platform.

This is the Jesus Model, the original plan. He chose 12, and at the end of three years, He worked it down to 11. Jesus spent three years with 11 people, 11 guys, just doing life with them. Building relationships, dealing with their issues and helping them know God. That's how Jesus did it. Isn't it arrogant and foolish to think we could improve on the methodology that Jesus established? It was God in the flesh. He had the best plan. We should have stuck with it. This is the Jesus' Plan.

Throughout the New Testament, we find examples of them meeting in homes. We are going to look at several of them. One of the Ekklesia, or home congregations, was at Cornelius' house. It is one of the first mentioned in Acts 10:22. This passage says that the following day, he, that is, Peter, arrived in Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. Talking with them, Peter went inside and found a large gathering of people.

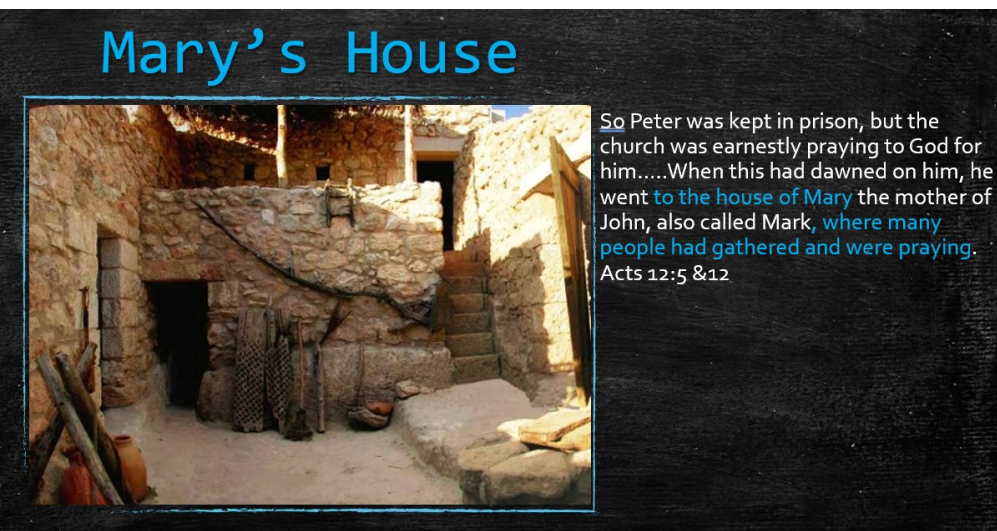
So, here's one of the first home congregations in Acts 10. A beautiful thing happens with Peter and Cornelius. They and all of those in Cornelius' house hear the word of the Lord. The beautiful thing about it is that Cornelius knew that Peter was coming and invited all his friends to come together. These were his close friends and relatives. Peter came and told them about Jesus. A similar experience happened to me.

In 1974, I led a county drug pusher to Christ almost by accident. He came to my office at the parsonage and wanted to know if there was some way that he could avoid the tribulation that was coming and how to survive. He had read the book *The Late Great Planet Earth*, written by Hal Lindsay. He and a friend of his had stored food up in the mountains of the state of Washington. During the tribulation, they planned to live in a cave in Washington for seven years. He thought maybe there was another way. So, he came down and talked to me, and I led him to Jesus.

He was a drug pusher. He got so excited about Jesus that he wanted to tell all his friends, so he invited them and the people to whom he had been selling drugs to his house for a Pizza Party. He also asked me to come and share my testimony or life story. I accepted his invitation to go and shared my life story with them in his living room. I was sitting on the floor, leaning up against the wall. The whole living room was filled with people. They sat on the bed, the couch, and the chairs, and the dining room table was full. And I shared with them about Jesus, and many came to faith in Christ. At the end of three years, we had over 35 former drug addicts in that congregation.

This is what Peter did at Cornelius's house. It was informal and relational, and he shared Jesus with them.

There was another Ekklesia at Mary's house. Mary's house was mentioned earlier



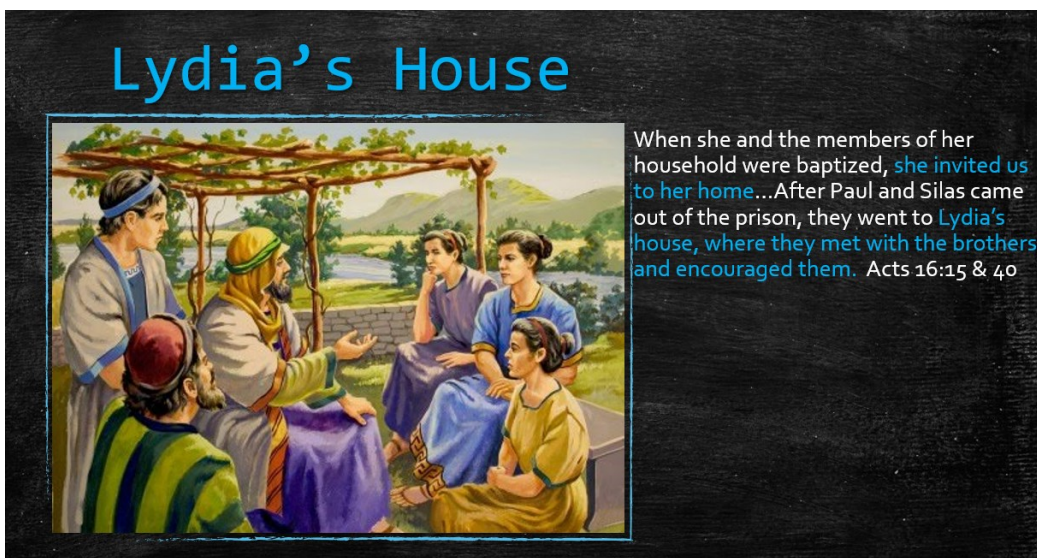
So Peter was kept in prison, but the church was earnestly praying to God for him.....When this had dawned on him, he went to the house of Mary the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. Acts 12:5 & 12

in this book when we talked about Peter being busted out of jail. When we spoke of binding and loosing, and the shackles were torn off of Peter's hands and feet, and he walked out of the pris-

on cell. Where did he go? He went to Mary's house, the Bible says. So, Peter was kept in prison, but the Ekklesia earnestly prayed to God for him. When it dawned on him that he wasn't just dreaming and that it was a reality, he went to the house of Mary, the mother of John, also called Mark, where many people had gathered and were praying. That is an Ekklesia, a home congregation. They met in prayer in Mary's house while Peter

was in prison. Peter was in jail, the Ekklesia prayed in the home, and he was set free. He was delivered, and the shackles came off. He was unshackled.

There is an Ekklesia at Lydia's house. In Acts chapter 16, when she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited Luke, Paul, and Silas to her home. These were the missionary band and Apostolic Team. This happened after Paul and Silas came out of prison.



When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home...After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them. Acts 16:15 & 40

They went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. That was an Ekklesia at Lydia's house. Paul, Silas, and

Luke are stopping to visit and encourage them.

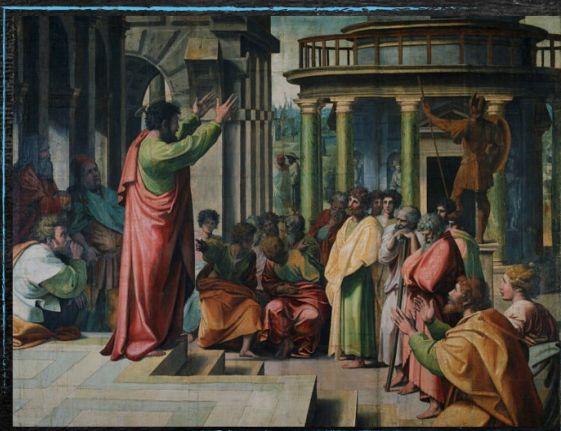
There was an Ekklesia at Paul's house, at the time of the end of his ministry here on earth. He was under house arrest in Rome

for two whole years, according to Acts 28. Paul stayed in a rented house and welcomed all who came to see him boldly without hindrance. He preached the Kingdom of God and taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. Wouldn't you have liked to have been in that home congregation? Wouldn't you have enjoyed sitting at the feet of the greatest Apostle that ever lived? Talking about the Kingdom of God and Jesus. What a great time they had together.

And then also Priscilla and Aquila.

Paul worked with them in tent-making and had a home congregation. The Bible says, "Greet Priscilla and Aquila, also greet the Ekklesia that meets at their house." And in I Corinthians says, "the Ekklesia in the province of Asia sends you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord. So does the Ekklesia that meets at their house."

## Paul's House



For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. Boldly and without hindrance he preached the Kingdom of God and taught them about the Lord Jesus Christ. Acts 28:30-31

## Priscilla & Aquila's House

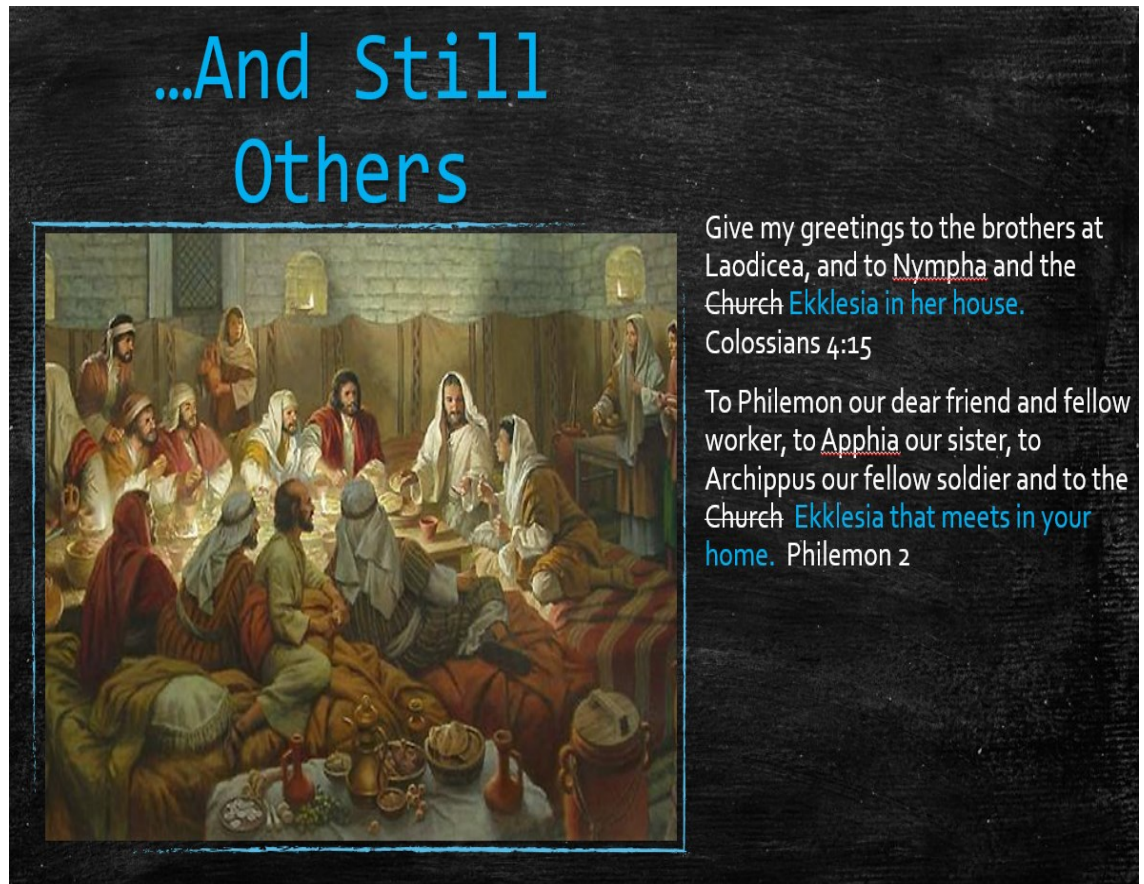


Greet Priscilla and Aquila...Greet also the Church Ekklesia that meets at their house. Romans 16:3-5

The Ekklesias churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does the Church Ekklesia that meet at their house. I Corinthians 16:19

They had an Ekklesia meeting in their home, and there were others also. We only covered some of them.

It is common for Christians to read through the book of Acts and the New Testament without focusing much on the meeting places of the early believers. It seems that most failed to notice that there were no church buildings. Homes were the gathering places. This has not been our experience in this day and age, but this was their experience. This is how it was done then, and we are talking about a return to this way of doing Ekklesia.



Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the Church Ekklesia in her house. Colossians 4:15

To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the Church Ekklesia that meets in your home. Philemon 2

Here's another one mentioned in Colossians 4:15. "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and Nymph and the Ekklesia in her house." Notice that Nymph was a woman and a recognized leader of a home congregation. It is interesting that many denominations don't recognize women as leaders in the church today.

And then we read in Philemon 2:2. "To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister. to Archippus, our fellow soldier and to the Ekklesia that meets in your home."

So, we will do a little comparison and contrast between the two models. You have the living room model, and you have the auditorium model. The auditorium model is the way we do church in America. The living room model is the way they did Ekklesia in the New Testament.

So, let's compare and contrast them so that you can see that church and Ekklesia are not the same. A home congregation is not the same thing as a church.

## Two Models, One Choice

### The Church in America

- Corporate CEO Leaders
- Program Driven
- Institutionalized
- Facility Based
- Sectarian Divisions
- Entertaining
- Educating

### The Ekklesia in Acts

- Servant Leaders
- Relational
- Organic & Living
- Home Based
- Kingdom Focused
- Empowering
- Equipping

In America, many churches are led by what is similar to a corporate structure. It is like a pyramid with a CEO at the top and a Board of Directors. We might call these a board of elders or a ministry board. The denomination I grew up in was called the Board of Administration. Then there are deacons, and there are committees, and other levels. It is a pyramid shape for an organizational structure.

If you took the organizational structure or chart of a large Corporation like GM or Ford Motor Company, laying it out on a table, and you took the corporate organizational structure of a mega church, laying it next to the corporation chart and compared them, you would see that they are very similar. The church in America is a corporation, and it is run like a business. The leadership usually runs the church like a CEO leader would run an organization.

The church in America is program driven. Some more extensive programs would be the Christmas cantata, the Christmas play, or the Easter musical in the spring. The invitation is to "Come to the program!" It is one program after another. Even evangelism is a program. Even if they have a home cell group, it is a program. And they have to be accountable and responsible for the vision of the corporate CEO leader and the overall vision of the Corporation and fall into that. This system contains many programs. One program after another tries to get people to come to the building.

The church is very institutionalized and usually incorporated as a 501C3 Corporation. It has become a very sterile business. Pastors, leaders, and church boards feel pressure to do what is best for the industry, what is best for the company, and what is best for the institution's mission.

The church is facility based. Everything is done inside the box. You come to the deliverance meeting. Come to the healing service. Come to the evangelistic service. It is all inside the box. You come there and get blessed, fed, delivered, and set free. You get taught, and then you go back home. It is all in the box.

The church is very sectarian with all the divisions, like Baptist, Lutheran, and Methodist. I grew up in a denomination called the United Brethren. They are all separate little divisions in the Body, in the Kingdom, because they are all corporations. And they are all separated from one another by their corporation papers and doctrinal statements. Every one of them thinks they have the best doctrinal statement. I grew up in a denomination like that. They thought theirs was best. If you left the sect, you were made to feel like you were going through your relationship with God. That's how divided it is.

Going to church is very entertaining. The better the show on the platform, the more significant the crowd. That has been my experience. I believe that some are so entertaining that they will survive the judgment of God on the system because people want entertainment. They like entertainment. They come for entertainment. So, you have smoke and mirrors, lights and fog machines, a polished sermon, and PowerPoint on the screen. You have videos inside the address and a killer worship team. People are going to come. It is very entertaining, and it is very educational. I have a nephew who told me he goes to a big mega-church every Sunday, like sitting in Bible college class.



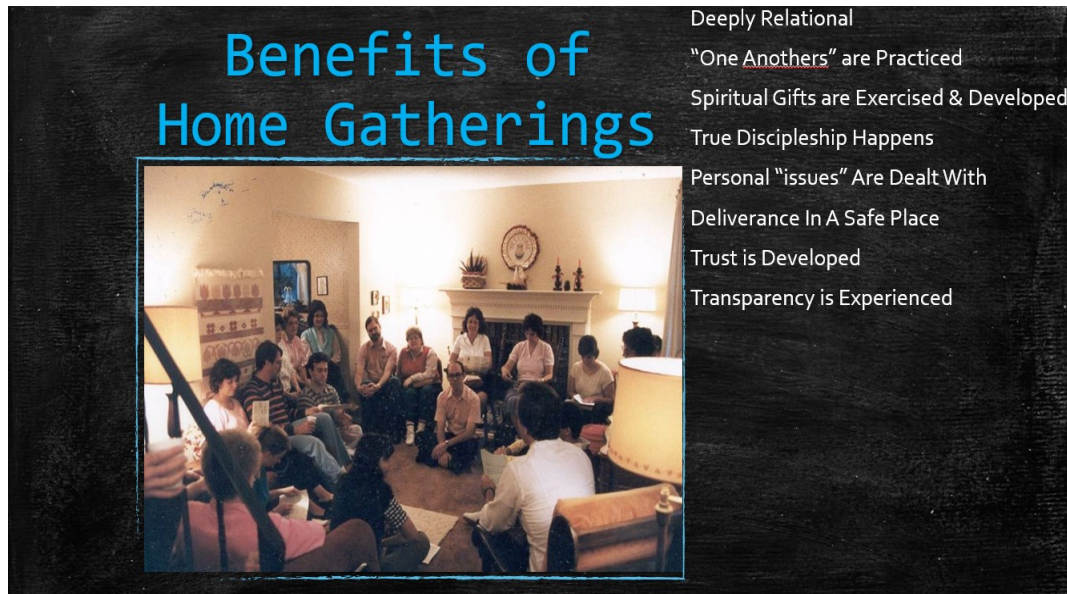
What about the Ekklesia in the book of Acts? Is it anything at all like that? No. Servant leaders lead it; if there is a pyramid, it is upside down, with the apostles and prophets in the basement. Lifting people into what God has called them is the foundation of the whole ministry. There is no overarching vision here at Omega Kingdom Ministry that everybody has to obey or fall into. We want you to fulfill the ministry that God has gifted and called you to. We will lift you. In the Ekklesia, we see servant leaders lifting others into the ministry that God has called them to.

There is no bulletin. But if there was a sequence to follow, it is to follow Jesus and what he wants to do with the people. It could be different every time. It might turn into a time of prayer. It might turn into an in-depth Bible study. It might turn into a time of everyone sharing stories and experiences of what went on that week. Someone might have a particular need, and everyone prays for that person. Every meeting is different. It is organic and living, and it follows the Holy Spirit. Every time whatever the Holy Spirit wants is what is done.



Jesus is the head, and we are parts of the body. We are living pieces responding to the head. It is not facility-based; it is home based. We call it a home congregation. It could happen anywhere. It works well in a living or dining room, but you could meet in a restaurant. You could meet in a coffee shop, a park bench, a picnic table, or a pavilion. It is not about the building. It's about what goes on in the meeting.

Here are eight benefits of home gatherings that you probably will not find in an auditorium meeting. Eight benefits that are pretty unique to home gatherings or home congregations. Some of these benefits might crossover a little bit into the auditorium meetings, but for the most part, you will not find these in the auditorium. Eight benefits of home gathering:



Number one: the meetings are profoundly relational. You get to know one another. When you attend the worship service at church, you are usually met at the door by some-

one who shakes your hand and helps you find a seat. For the next hour and a half, you either watch the show on the platform or look at the back of someone's head. That is not what happens in the living room. In the living room, you meet face to face.

You share your life, your burdens, your problems, your issues, and your testimonies. You share your victories and your answers to prayer. You get to know one another and know each other's families and what goes on with their children. All the another's of the New Testament are practiced in the Ekklesia. In one of the upcoming chapters, we will discuss one another's. The one another's are essential. The Bible says that we are to love one another, pray for one another, bear one another burdens, encourage one another, take with one another, accept one another, and admonish one another. All of that goes on in the living room, and very little goes on in the auditorium. One of my most significant issues with the auditorium model is that most of the one another's are not practiced.

Some mega-churches are trying to institute cell groups and small groups because they know they have neglected one another. In the home congregation, all of the one another's are practiced.

Spiritual gifts are exercised and developed in the Ekklesia. In the auditorium, a few people get to exercise their skills on the platform while the rest of the people watch. Everyone gets to exercise their spiritual gifts in the home congregation and develop them. The only way your spiritual gifts will grow is if you exercise them. They are like a muscle; if you don't use them, they won't grow. They will atrophy. God has given us some unique, extraordinary gifts, and we need to exercise them.

In the living room, everyone has permission to exercise their gifts because we all minister to one another. We are going to learn more about this in an upcoming chapter.

True discipleship happens in the Ekklesia. Disciples are made. Jesus met with the eleven and made them disciples, faithful followers of Jesus Christ. Not followers of a church, not followers of a denomination, not followers of some charismatic leader of a church. True discipleship happens when we follow Jesus and do what he wants us to do, and we become more and more like Jesus.

Many churches will teach you how to be a good church member. This is not discipleship. This is church membership. Church membership and discipleship of Jesus are not the same things. You could be a good church member, knowing very little about Jesus and following him. He is our standard. He is the one we are to measure up to. The bar is not whether you are a good church member like, I am a good Catholic, a good Lutheran, or a good Baptist. NO! It is not about being a good Catholic, a good Lutheran, or a good Baptist. Are you a follower of Jesus? He is an example. He is the model. He is the one we follow, and all of this happens in the living room gathering.

When people are not confronted and admonished, they do not have to deal with stuff in their own life. In Ekklesia, personal issues are dealt with. Sometimes the living room model gets messy because we have held on to our problems. Many of these issues come up in the meetings. For example, someone was abandoned as a child. This is a profound wound that they have never dealt with. Maybe someone was abused, and they never really dealt with it. Issues like these often get buried and covered up. People don't deal with problems, and as a result, they don't grow past them. But in the living room, issues come out. Sometimes the living room model is messy, but deliverance can take place in a safe place.

I can tell you a true story that took place in the mountains of Colorado. We had a home congregation, a house church that met in our living room. A retired pastor and his wife came, and we had our Ekklesia meeting. We met one Sunday morning, and during the worship, singing, and prayer time, I had a vision of the blood of Jesus running down the wall of the room. The blood came to a place where an inside door with a gap at the bottom so that air could circulate in and out of the room. The blood ran through the hole at the bottom of the door. I just shared that vision with the people. I said I needed to find out who this was for. I don't know what it's about, but I know it is for someone here. I don't know who it is or don't know what it's about, but the blood of Jesus is bringing healing to someone's closed-up room in their life today.

Suddenly, this pastor's wife started crying; she broke down and was crying profusely. She said, "I know who it is. I know what it is; it's me, me." She explained that when she was a little girl, she was sexually molested by an uncle. She never told anyone about it. She locked it up inside of her. Her husband, who was sitting beside her, didn't even know. She never told him. She shared that all her life, she felt dirty, used, worthless, and like other people, were always judging her. She thought it was her fault, and she felt rejected all the time. She thought if someone looked at her, they were leaving her. That Sunday, she opened up and shared in a home congregation.

This is a woman in her mid to late 60s who finally got healing and deliverance in a safe place. It was a beautiful thing. We laid hands on her. She was delivered from the spirit of rejection and defilement and set free. She began to love her husband and others around her in a way she'd never experienced. She began to feel like people loved her. What a beautiful thing happened.

You see, deliverance in the auditorium is sometimes bizarre. I've been there. I've done that, and I'm sure people are sitting in the pew and wondering what is going on at the altar. There were indeed weird things going on. But in the living room, deliverance is a family loving on a family member, and everyone is supportive and encouraging. It's just a beautiful thing. Trust is developed. Trust is one part of a two-part foundation. For true fellowship, the other part is transparency. Minimal trust and transparency happen with



congregations of 400 or 10,000 people. You might trust one or two people, but absolute trust and transparency aren't happening because you need more time to build relationships with that many people.

The program is rolling on. It takes time to develop trust with someone. It takes time to open your heart and be transparent with your life. That happens in the living room. You sit in the living room and share your life with someone week after week for six months, and you really

## Way Off Course



"The switch from *ekklesia* to church completely changed the trajectory of the Body of Christ. It went from impact to impotence; from power to programs; and from evangelizing to entertaining. The 'church' has become an institution too often focused on survival rather than souls."

Tim Kurtz

Get to know one another. It is difficult for people to hide for that long of a period. It just can't happen. It is not allowed because people will ask questions. People get to share, people get to trust, and their

hearts get to live again. There's a beautiful song by Phillips Craig, and Dean called *Tell Your Heart to Beat Again*. It's about trusting your heart to live again. The music is gorgeous, and I love it.

Somewhere around 325 AD, the body of Christ got off the tracks. We went off the rails and the course. A good friend wrote one of the books on the suggested reading list. The book is *Leaving Church Becoming Ekklesia* by Tim Kurtz. Tim summarizes everything I've been saying to you in this chapter. In the book, he says, "The switch from *Ekklesia* to church completely changed the trajectory of the Body of Christ. It went from impact to impotence. It went from power to programs. It went from evangelizing to entertaining. The church has become an institution too often focused on survival rather than souls." God bless Tim Kurtz, my brother in the Lord. He said it all in one paragraph. He said everything I've been saying in this chapter.

Every chapter has an application and activation because we want you to do the word and not just hear it. You are not going to sit in a pew, hear a sermon, and then go home and do nothing. This is not what we do here. We have guaranteed you will have a home congregation in your community **if** you do the applications and activations. I can tell you that I'm canceling the warranty if you don't do it. There is no warranty or guarantee of a home congregation if you don't do the applications and activations. This is important for you to do. We want you to go and find someone who does not attend church. It could be someone who used to go to church and got hurt or offended.

Many things might have happened, but they don't attend church anymore. Find them and have them over to your house for a meal. The meal that you choose

is not essential, have a meal together.

## Application & Activation

### Go



Find someone who does not attend

Invite them to your house for a meal

Share your life with them, get to know them

After dinner, as you are sitting around chatting. Ask them, "Is there something we can pray for you before our time together is over?"

We live at the Lake, and a lot happens in our front yard at the fire pit. You could do that. You could have a barbeque. Invite some friends over,

but you need to go

to someone and invite them over to your place. Share your life with them. All you have to do is start talking. You can do this. All you have to do is share, maybe about a job change or something going on in the life of one of your children or grandchildren. Share something from your life. You have to take the initiative to share stories about your job, kids, grandkids, home, relationship, or something. Just share your life with them. You will discover that when you share your life, they will also talk about their lives. Usually, if you tell a story about one of your children or grandchildren, they will relate to it and tell you a story about one of their children or grandchildren. Before you go home, after the dinner's over, all you have to do is say, "Hey, it was great spending time with you hanging out this evening. We are glad you came over. I noticed you shared earlier about your grandson having a problem at college. Could we take a moment and pray for your grandson before you go home?" That is all you have to do.

People will also open up and share as you share and are transparent. They will share things, and you will have your eyes and ears opened. Just ask them, "Before we go home tonight could I pray for you about...?" And then you fill in the blank with what they were talking about earlier in the evening. That's your homework assignment.