

Christian Leadership 3 – Week 10

The Privilege of Being a Home Group Leader

Introduction

I want to talk about the importance of having a deep conviction that it is a privilege for you and me to be home group leaders. Since we are a home group-based church, home group leadership is centrally important—and perpetually under satanic attack. And if Satan can't keep you from this role or get you out of this role, one of the main ways he neutralizes you in this role is to destroy your sense of privilege to be in it.

So here is a very important question: “What is my predominant disposition about being a home group leader?” Is it “I get to” or “I’ve got to?” If you lead for any length of time, you will struggle at times with the “I’ve got to” perspective. But you must struggle against it, not accept it. And you must cultivate the “I get to” perspective so that it predominates. This is important for many reasons—but here are the two biggest:

Because it greatly affects *your* effectiveness as a leader. One of the keys to leadership effectiveness, Paul says in 1 Tim. 4:15,16, is to keep making progress in the role. “I’ve got to” leaders just want to just get by instead of wanting to get better. But “getting by” is an illusion—getting by in anything means doing a poor job.

Because it will greatly affect *others'* aspiration to home group leadership. Paul says that leading in the church is a great, noble work, so desiring intensely to become a leader is great and noble (1 Tim. 3:1). We should be seeing at least some people in our home groups who evidence this aspiration. And if we aren't seeing this, the first place we should look is “in the mirror”—beginning with our perspective toward our own leadership. If am predominantly “I’ve got to,” I will be perceived as a punished model that others will not want to imitate.

Is this part of the reason why I have heard of many home group people saying:
“I’m glad you do this, but I don’t want to do it?”

Is this why several home group leaders thought I was being facetious when I called a workshop: “Home group leadership is awesome!”

The fact is that “I get to” leaders can deteriorate into “I’ve got to” leaders. This is where many of us are. But the good news is that this is not inevitable, and it is reversible: “I’ve got to” leaders can be restored to “I get to” leaders. How do we cultivate and maintain this conviction? Most of it has to do with what we focus on pertaining to this role. This simple 4-LAYER TRIANGLE below represents four proper objects of focus *in the proper order of importance*.



Home group conditions are *not* foundational

The first thing to understand is that this conviction is not connected in any *foundational* way with the conditions of our home groups (e.g., numerical growth; unity; discipleship quality; etc.)! We monitor these things, and we try to improve them, and we rejoice when they are good/improve—but be careful not to focus on them for your conviction of privilege. They are like the top layer of the pyramid—they make a great top, but a very poor foundation – like an upside-down pyramid that leads to extreme instability.

It is possible to have very difficult home group conditions (including poor conditions resulting from our own mistakes) and yet have a deep and abiding conviction of privilege.

Paul was in the midst of very difficult conditions with the Corinthians (disunity; false teachers; mistrust of and hostility toward Paul) when he wrote the “Grand Digression” (2 Cor. 2:14-7:6), which exudes this conviction. Recent good developments with the Corinthians were the bonus—*not* the baseline reason for Paul’s sense of privilege.

I have experienced this. I have this conviction pretty regularly in our present home group, which has some of the most difficult conditions I have ever faced.

In fact, favorable conditions can lure you into a sense of privilege that is based on the favorable conditions. The main way you know this is that the sense of privilege evaporates when the conditions deteriorate—especially if you have to lead in unfavorable conditions for a long time. This is where many of us are.

The foundational reason: It is a gift of God’s grace

At the foundation of this conviction of privilege is the cultivated awareness that being a home group leader is *a gift of God’s grace*. It is an incredible privilege to have *any* role at all in God’s work. This is what Paul says in 2 Cor. 4:1. Why doesn’t he lose heart? Why is he always “of good courage?” His first reason in this passage is that he sees this ministry as a gift of God’s mercy.

If you want a great example of this focus, meditate on Ephesians—especially Eph. 3. In the midst of non-ideal church conditions (Paul is imprisoned and the Ephesian church is in crisis), Paul marvels out loud that God would give him the privilege of being a leader in His church (3:7-9). How much do you think about this disparity between your unworthiness and inadequacy on the one hand, and on God’s amazing desire to work through you to accomplish the most important work in this age? Do you meditate on this (see 1 Cor. 15:9,10; 2 Cor. 2:16; 3:5,6)? Do you ask God to open the eyes of your heart to this part of “the hope of your calling” (Eph. 1:18)? Fight for this!

Speaking about leaders who feel resentful over not being recognized, Ajith Fernando says: “Biblically speaking, all that we do for God is given to us to do because of His mercy. We do not deserve the great honor of being servants in the work of the great God of heaven. Our lives are such that we are hopelessly unqualified for every responsibility we are given. Therefore everything is a bonus. When we

realize that, we are grateful that God has chosen to use us . . . (and) instead of counting the cost of our service, our focus will be on the marvels of God's grace."¹

This is probably where some of us need to start. But there are more reasons . . .

It helps us become more godly

I'll give you another key reason why it is a privilege for me to be a home group leader. Staying in this role has helped me to keep growing toward what I want most to be—a godly man. It's not just that we should choose the most godly people to be leaders (1 Tim. 3), or that that leaders should work hard at becoming more godly in order to be more effective (1 Tim. 4:12-15). It's that *sticking at it* in this role greatly *helps us become more godly*. For example:

It has helped me to thrive more on giving God's love—to live this “branch” life and experience more of the joy that results from this way of life (Jn. 15:10-12). I have known this truth for decades, and I experienced it before I became a leader. But staying in this role provides a healthy pressure to choose between being a hypocrite and going deeper into this lifestyle.

It has helped me to be nourished by God's Word—both by being driven to meditate on the Word to stay vital (Lk. 10:39,42), and by being nourished by what I teach others (1 Tim. 4:6). I know we need to develop this discipline no matter what. But having this role has provided a healthy pressure to take my life from the Word.

It has helped me to identify and lean against my besetting sins (Heb. 12:1). Like sticking at marriage, sticking at leadership is the “school-house for character.” It (often through other leaders) has helped me to see my fleshly competitiveness, my self-righteousness, my avoidance of conflict. It has made it more difficult to avoid these character deficiencies. And it has provided a healthy pressure to work on them under God's grace.

It has helped me to become more of a pray-er (Col. 4:2). This has always been a weak area for me, and I make no pretense of being a prayer warrior. But staying in leadership has driven me more and more to prayer because I just can't do it by my own strength and ingenuity.

It has helped me to focus more on my hope in the next life (2 Cor. 4:16-18)—which renews me and cuts my present sufferings down to size. The difficulties of leading (including the disappointment and disapproval of people I lead) pressure me to look toward the future reward that will come from pleasing God through faithful leadership (1 Pet. 5:4).

Aren't these at the heart of godliness? Isn't this what you really, deep-down want to be? Isn't this what truly results in peace and hope and joy? Don't step yourself out (actively or passively) of this role that helps you become more godly!

These two reasons should be more than enough to convince us that it is a privilege to be a home group leader! But there are *other “perks”* that accrue to those who stick at it for years . . .

¹ Ajith Fernando, *The Call To Joy & Pain* (Crossway, 2007), pp. 134,135.

Other “perks”

Most of my best friends are people I disciplined and/or led with in home group. The rest are people I have led with in other contexts. Yes, there have been very painful lost friendships, but the joy and stability of these friendships more than compensates.

I’m positive it has kept me out of all kinds of trouble. I am a buzz-junky, and one of the main reasons I haven’t drifted back into this is because I value being allowed to lead (because of all these reasons) so much that I don’t want to jeopardize it. I wish I was more spiritual—but this is the truth! Like David, I need to be at my leadership post so that I don’t get bored and do something really stupid (2 Sam. 11:1ff.).

It has been so good for our marriage. It has provided a crucial arena to serve others together. It has kept us with fellow-leaders who have spoken into our marriage. Without this, we would have more easily drifted into parallel lives (especially after the nest emptied).

It has been so good for our children. Both of my daughters testify that the benefits of growing up with parents deeply involved in home group leadership far outweighed the pressures and interruptions and sadness associated with it. They grew up in a home that was open to all kinds of people. They saw the ravages of sin through some of these people. They experienced the joy generated by good fellowship. They gained many “older brothers and sisters” that are still in their lives. I believe that they saw through our example that serving others is an abundant life, and I trust that this will be a strong influence in their lives and families.

I have seen the two-fold promise of 1 Tim. 3:13 fulfilled (read).

I have reaped the reward of “high standing” through being a home group leader—which I take to mean spiritual respect that gives me more opportunity to influence many more people for Christ. How cool is that?

I have reaped the reward of “greater confidence in the faith”—I have seen God’s faithfulness to support me in this role, and I can speak more confidently to others about His faithfulness. How cool is that?

My wife and I have so many stories of people, adventures, situations, etc. When another one happens, we look at each other and say: “That goes in the book!” Even if we don’t write it in this life, it is being written for the next. This is part of an abundant life!

Conclusion

Do you need to repent from accepting an “I’ve got to” perspective on your role as a home group leader? If God is telling you this, now is the time to respond!

Will you commit to cultivating this perspective by regularly meditating on these things and thanking God for them? This is a key part of what Paul calls “rejoicing in the Lord.”

Will you help one another do both of the above as needed? We need this kind of help from our fellow-home group leaders!

This perspective will go a long way toward our lives glorifying God! This perspective will also be a huge influence on our people to glorify God with their lives!