

# ***Pastoral Care and Covenant Community***

- Peace Precedes Unity and Anointing
- Fellowship, Love, Outreach, Care and Kingdom
- Caring Friendship, Relational Covenant

## **I. The Bond of Peace**

Northgate Community Church embraces what we call **the bond of peace**. This is understood in our congregation as covenantal fellowship. It involves a pastoral focus.

*“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the **BOND OF PEACE**. How good and pleasant it is, when brother live together in unity ... for there, God commands a blessing. Make my joy complete, but being likeminded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Look not only to your own interests, but also to the interest of others” (Eph. 4:3; Ps. 133:1; Phil. 2:2-4).*

We believe body life and covenantal fellowship are high priorities for any local church. We assert that the local church is a body of believers and finds great value as a functioning corporate assembly of saints. We are comprised of those whose covenant-rooted relationships cause the building up of each member of the body in love. We believe the basic commitment is to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. We resist those who backbite, gossip, give or receive bad reports, or seek to cause disharmony in other ways. We believe that if every person is indwelt by and living moment-by-moment by the infilling power of the Holy Spirit, each is able to function warmly and interact comfortably with other people.

We believe that the pattern of fellowship emerges when we seek genuine enjoyment of being together, sharing our lives, and caring one for another. When people build bonds of genuine trust and covenant relationship, it allows for a quality of strength and steadfastness to develop amidst the storms of life. The desire for quality relationships is at the very heart of a truly loving local church.

We believe every member has God-given motivations and giftings and is to function fruitfully in the body. We believe that all valid ministries are rooted in a local assembly even for those who may travel in trans-local ministry. It is unlikely that one can bear lasting fruit for Jesus if he functionally and relationally ignores the very body that Jesus

endorsed and within which He operates as the Head. We believe that a Christian properly related to the local assembly will be involved with their time, finances, energies and creativities.

We believe in and are committed to the principle of caring for the weakest: the widows, the orphans, older people and children. If we care for the weakest, we can care for the stronger. We believe in the need for fellowship, a sense of community and togetherness. We believe friendliness is characteristic of the gospel. Jesus was the friend of sinners, strangers and the outcast. We are committed to finding ways to assimilate newcomers, avoid cliques, and recognize that people are often insecure and that there are different touch points upon entering a community of faith. We believe in the importance of calling people to be part of a cell-structure of small group relationships for the purposes of fellowship, love, outreach, care, and kingdom life.

## II. Flock Home Groups in the New Testament Church

*Luke 12:31-32 – “Seek the kingdom of God, and all these things shall be added to you. Do not fear, **little flock**, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (NKJV).*

We believe small groups meeting in homes in the New Testament times may have been the backbone of the early apostolic church. According to Acts 2:43, the New Testament believers worshipped together regularly as “they met in the temple” and “they met...from house-to-house” in small groups for communion, sharing meals with great joy and thankfulness, praising God (Acts 2:46-47).

The church exists to make disciples who grow into true followers of Jesus and who in turn win souls. We should be harvest motivated, but it takes disciples to reap the harvest. Successful small groups are filled with disciples of Jesus who are devoted and developing followers of Christ Jesus in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Home fellowship groups are the coming together of seven to seventeen people on a regular basis in homes for the purposes of worship, nurture, fellowship, ministry and prayer. It is our goal to encourage every person in the church to make a personal decision to commit him or herself to be part of a small group.

We recognize that each little flock home group will have (and should have) its own personality and unique flavor. Yet, after much prayer and discussion, it has been discerned that the following ideas and guidelines provide for some degree of consistency and ensure that the home groups' ministry is headed in a unified direction. The following biblical verses provide an initial sense of what occurred in the New Testament.

1. *John 10:15-17 – “And other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be **one flock** and one shepherd” (NKJV).*

2. Acts 2:45-47 – “45 And sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need. 46 So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from **house to house**, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, 47 praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved” (NKJV).
3. Acts 5:42 – “And daily in the temple, and **in every house**, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ.” NKJV “Day after day, in the temple courts and from **house to house**, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ” (NIV).
4. Acts 12:12, TLB – When Peter and John were supernaturally released from prison, “he went to **the house of Mary**, mother of John Mark, where many were gathered for a prayer meeting.” The NKJV says, “many were gathered together praying.”
5. Acts 16:40 – “Paul and Silas...went **to Lydia’s house**, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them.”
6. Acts 18:7, 11. When excluded from the synagogues, “Paul went next door to **the house of Titus Justus**, a worshipper of God. Paul stayed (in Corinth) for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.”
7. Acts 20:20-21, 28 – “I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from **house to house**, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all **the flock**, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing **the flock**” (NKJV).
8. Romans 16:3-5 – “Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also the church that meets **at their house**. Greet my dear friend Epenetus, who was the first convert to Christ in the province of Asia” (cf. I Cor. 16:19).
9. Romans 16:10-11 – “Greet those who belong to the **household** of Aristobulus. Greet those in the **household** of Narcissus who are in the Lord.”
10. I Cor 16:19 -- “The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla greet you heartily in the Lord, with the church that is **in their house**.”

11. 1 Peter 5:1-4 – “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd **the flock** of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to **the flock**; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (NKJV).

12. Psalm 78:52-53 – “But He made His own people go forth like sheep, and guided them in the wilderness like **a flock**; and He led them on safely, so that they did not fear; but the sea overwhelmed their enemies” (NKJV).

13. Micah 5:4-5 – “And He shall stand and feed **His flock** in the strength of the LORD, in the majesty of the name of the LORD His God; and they shall abide, for now He shall be great to the ends of the earth; and this One shall be peace” (NKJV).

14. Song 6:2-3 – “My beloved has gone to his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed **his flock** in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine. He feeds **his flock** among the lilies.”

15. Matt 18:15-20, especially verse 20 -- “For where two or three **come together** in my name, there am I with them.”

16. Philemon 1,2 -- “To Philemon our beloved friend and fellow laborer, to the beloved Apphia, Archippus our fellow soldier, and to **the church in your house**.”

17. Col 4:15 – “Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and **the church in her house**.”

Justin Martyr (100-165 A. D.) – Recorded in “The Martyrdom of the Holy Martyrs” in a confrontation where Rusticus, the prefect, asked Justin Martyr, “Where do you assemble?” Justin replied: “Where each one chooses and can, for do you fancy that we all meet in the very same place: not so, because the God of the Christians is not circumscribed by place.”

### III. Christian Community Today

We use the acronym F.L.O.C.K. to help define our commitment to groups as the place for fellowship, love, outreach, care, and kingdom growth.

**F = Fellowship:** The flock group serves as a base for fellowship and friendship, both inwardly and outwardly. Home groups are the base of social interaction between saints

**L = Love:** The flock group is a community of saints sharing life and life, intent on helping one another glorify God in all that they do, personally, family, career and spiritually. The flock group develops believers as they grow into maturity and are equipped to serve as servant evangelists.

**O = Outreach:** The flock group serves as a base for outreach and openness to

people everywhere, through witness, evangelism and servanthood to the unchurched through acts of love, kindness, and sharing testimony of God's love.

**C = Care:** The flock group provides a place for care and community. It provides mutual encouragement (nurture), mutual edification (discipleship), and mutual exhortation (accountability). Home groups build community. See the "one another" commands. The goal is mutual edification in Christ-centered faith, discipleship and issues of daily life.

**K = Kingdom:** Kingdom growth and *kenosis* (self-emptying humility) are keys to covenant community. We want our home group members to move supernaturally in the power of God and to move in the language and actions of faith. This requires Christlike maturity and the spiritual ability to multiply faith in others. Society is thirsting for reality and a way to enjoy and express genuine relationship.

Thus, flock groups are spiritual families and serve as a backbone for Northgate Community Church as a Community of Faith providing opportunity for mutual ministry and servant outreach. Small group participation allows for dynamic interactions to prevail as believers "pursue love, and desire spiritual gifts." We believe these three important dimensions are "edification," "exhortation" and "comfort" for one another (1 Cor 14:3).  
Three Aspects:

- 1. Mutual Edification in Christ-centered faith, the study of the Word, and life-view issues.*
- 2. Mutual Exhortation in matters of discipleship and daily living and life-success issues.*
- 3. Mutual Encouragement and comfort in areas of personal healing and life-crisis.*

## **IV. Normal Elements in the Home Group Meeting**

Life in small groups is centered in the reality and potential of life in Christ Jesus as shared together between everyday normal people. It is a reflection of God's love and intention. The typical meeting of a home group might involve the following:

- 1. Welcome:** Making people feel relationally secure and loved. The home group meeting starts the minute each person walks through the door. Be friendly (Proverbs 18:24). Introduce yourself. Learn people's names.
- 2. Worship:** Attention focused on the Lord inviting His presence. This is the most crucial part of the meeting—to worship and yield to the Lord in song, praise, adoration and prayer. Goal: to bring our spiritual self into tune and harmony with the Holy Spirit (Eph 5:18-21).
- 3. Walk:** Interacting about matters of walking out the gospel. Our goal is to encourage and help individuals walk in personal victory with Christ, that is present each man complete in Christ (Col. 1:28).

**4. Witness:** How is it going? What is God doing in your life? In Acts 5:42, Luke indicates that a purpose for small group meetings was evangelism. The small group is a base for evangelism, outreach and ministry, both internally and externally to the larger community. The goal is touching people strategically as we engage, embrace and enlist with various methods of kindness.

**5. Work:** Pastoring is touching, talking, guiding, caring for and praying for God's people. Pastoral work involves shepherding (I Pet 5:2), managing (I Tim 3:5), leading (Heb 13:17), and loving God's people at all levels (John 10). The pastoral purpose of home groups is to be a place for a covenantal interaction that provides for care, edification, encouragement, and a natural place to feel accountability for spiritual growth.

**6. Welfare:** Caring for one another. Home group leaders and the mutual love of the members of a home group will be a constant source of help, wisdom and counsel. Turn to your home group leaders in time of need or crisis. If they can't help you in particular, they at least will lend a listening ear and perhaps refer you to others who can provide significant help.

**7. Word:** The discussion and application of the Word of God. The small group is a place of edification and discipleship, with the goal of bringing forth a people who enjoy and base their lives in the authority of the Word of God, learning and applying God's Word, becoming disciplined, developing character and walking out covenant precepts.

## **V. Scriptural Examples: Dividing into Small Groupings**

We need to be able to build relationships on a small group level so true interpersonal caring and sharing will spontaneously develop. Every believer needs a small group where they belong and can find spiritual support. Home Groups help people touch people where they are at in their personal existence day-to-day: (1) self identity struggles; (2) loneliness; (3) de-personalization of contemporary society; (4) relaxed informal setting; and (5) hurts needing healing. Furthermore, small groups provide opportunities for individual expression and where a greater number of believers can find their place and experience the gifts of the Spirit.

More effective pastoral oversight occurs in a decentralized model. Rather than one man, traditionally called the "pastor," attempting to care for all the sheep, it is more creative and effective to spread the shepherding task and allow certain mature individuals to become home group leaders and serve on the pastoral team. Note the following examples:

1. Mark 6:39-40. Jesus divided 5,000 men plus women and children into groups of hundreds and fifties, who were then ministered to by Christ through the agency of his disciples. Christ didn't personally try to minister to each of the 5,000 people. He broke the bread, gave it to his disciples, and they ministered it to the people.

2. Acts 2:42. Three thousand people confessed Christ as Lord, were baptized and they devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching and to the fellowship and to the breaking of bread and prayer.

3. Exodus 18:17-23. Jethro rebukes Moses for not distributing the ministry of oversight and ministry to people to associates. He was trying to do everything, and as a result, much was not getting done. Jethro scolded him and suggested a procedure dividing the workload.

*Ex 18:17-23 – “What you do is not good. 18 Both you and these people who are with you will surely wear yourselves out. For this thing is too much for you; you are not able to perform it by yourself. 19 Listen now to my voice; I will give you counsel, and God will be with you: Stand before God for the people, so that you may bring the difficulties to God. 20 And you shall teach them the statutes and the laws, and show them the way in which they must walk and the work they must do. 21 Moreover you shall select from all the people able men, such as fear God, men of truth, hating covetousness; and place such over them to be rulers of thousands, rulers of hundreds, rulers of fifties, and rulers of tens. 22 And let them judge the people at all times. Then it will be that every great matter they shall bring to you, but every small matter they themselves shall judge. So it will be easier for you, for they will bear the burden with you. 23 If you do this thing, and God so commands you, then you will be able to endure, and all this people will also go to their place in peace” (NKJV).*

4. This organizational principle of dividing enabled each person to feel and receive a kind of personal attention that brought fulfillment and effective ministry. The people were divided and placed under eldering under-shepherds.

*Numbers 11:16-17. “So the LORD said to Moses: “Gather to Me seventy men of the elders of Israel, whom you know to be the elders of the people and officers over them; bring them to the tabernacle of meeting, that they may stand there with you. 17Then I will come down and talk with you there. I will take of the Spirit that is upon you and will put the same upon them; and they shall bear the burden of the people with you, that you may not bear it yourself alone.”*

Small leadership teams accomplish ministry. Abraham's twelve sons produced twelve tribes. Jesus spent time with twelve men. Paul developed a plural missionary team (Acts 13:13). According to Acts 20:21-23, there were nine members. We are training and developing future leadership. True leaders develop best in the arena of actual ministry and sharing with people.

## VI. Five Strategic Purposes of Flock Groups

### 1. AWAKE: To Glorify God! – WORSHIP

#### Great Commission: “Obeying” Message of the Word (Blessing).

Our vision and passion is to glorify God by exalting Jesus Christ as Lord. The flock group is a small community of saints intent on helping one another honor God in all that they do, personally, family, career and spiritually. Corporately, in large and small groups, we gather for prophetic worship and the Word.

### 2. REACH: To Win Souls!

#### FRIENDSHIP Great Commission:

#### “Going” → Milk of the Word (Bonding)

Our vision is the mobilization of effective Christian believer-priests in life-style evangelism. A flock group serves as a base for genuine koinonia and prayerful intercession from which we reach out to touch others and bring them to the love of God in Christ Jesus.

The flock group mission: reaching out to strangers and the lonely beyond the group through witness and servant like compassion.

### 3. GROUND: To Nurture Believers! – RELATIONSHIP

#### Great Commission: “Baptizing” → Meat of the Word (Becoming)

Our vision is every convert thoroughly rooted in the reality of Christ Jesus with solid foundations of faith and safely grounded in small group fellowship. We provide Grace Encounter Training and urge baptism which initiates a new believer into Christian identity and community. Life in the small groups provides Christian community, care for one another, and a loving place for support in growth and living out the Gospel.

### 4. TRAIN: To Grow Disciples! – DISCIPLESHIP (Teacher Focus)

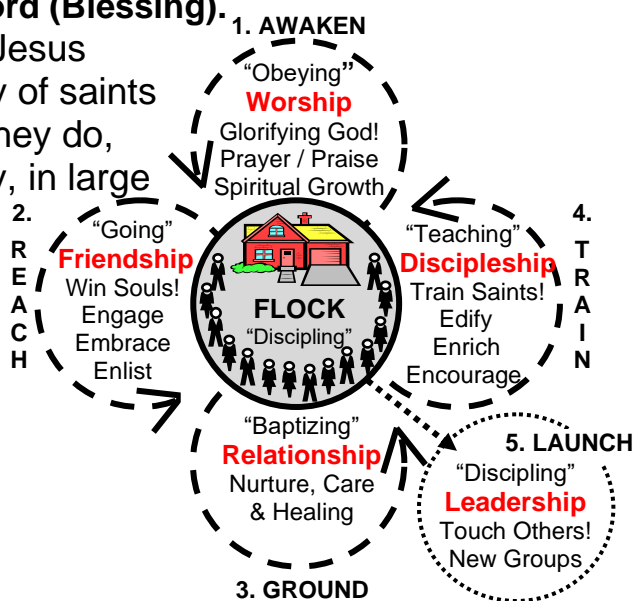
#### Great Commission: “Teaching” → Muscle of the Word (Building)

Our vision is helping disciples become effective stewards of life, family, career employment and witness. Flock group’s help believers grow into maturity and serve as a base from which express service to others. Edification in the flock group is supplemented by equipping in Northgate’s Pathway Classes.

### 5. LAUNCH: To Touch Others! - LEADERSHIP (Reproduce Focus)

#### Great Commission: “Discipling” → Mission of the Word (Birthing)

Our desire is the multiplication of new home groups touching needy people, sending out those who are disciples in turn to make disciples, thus, extending hope to hopeless people in a world of hopelessness.





## VII. Covenant Relationships

Covenant is a biblical mandate and a practical issue. What is the heart of God? What are the reasons to call for clear-cut covenant commitment in a church and between people?

### A. Covenant is a Unity Issue

#### 1. Unity Is the Heart of Jesus

*John 17:21: "Father make them **ONE** even as we are one." Jesus called for unity 5 times in John 17:11, 21, 22, 23.*

#### 2. Unity Is Being in One Accord in One Place

*Acts 2:1 - "When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place." Note that the early church answered the prayer of Jesus five times in Acts (1:14; 2:1, 46; 4:24; 5:12).*

#### 3. Unity Is Seeking to Be Perfectly United in Mind and Thought

1 Cor 1:10-11 - "I plead with you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment."

Eph 4:3 – "Keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

2 Cor 13:11 – "Be of one mind, live in peace."

Phil 2:2a – "Make my joy complete by being like minded."

Phil 2:2b – "Have the same love...one in spirit and purpose."

Phil 4:2 – To Euodia and Syntyche: "Be of the same mind."

Col 2:2 - "Be encouraged in heart and united in love."

### B. Covenant Is a Loyalty Issue

Loyalty is the salt of covenant relationships (II Chron 13:5). It is maintaining loyalty one to another by not giving or receiving bad reports about another and by earnestly seeking to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Phil 2:1-4; Eph 4:1-5) and to promote "koinonia" evidenced by the knitting of hearts and the following:

- 1) Gladness and singleness of heart (Acts 2:46)
- 2) Willingness to share with one another (Acts 4:32-35)
- 3) Love of the brethren (I Jon 4:7, 8)
- 4) Teachable spirit, ability to hear (Eph 4:11-16)
- 5) Sharing of one's life (Heb 10:24-25)
- 6) Abiding in the truth and in the Lord (Col. 2:6-7)

## C. Covenant Is an Anointing Issue

*Psalm 133:1, 2 – “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Hermon, descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the Lord commanded the blessing--life forevermore.”*

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|--|---------------|
| 1. Good and pleasant                   | • ENJOYABLE   |
| 2. Brethren                            | • FRIENDSHIP  |
| 3. Dwell together in unity             | • COVENANT    |
| 4. Precious oil running down           | • ANOINTING   |
| From the Head → Beard → Collar → Robes |               |
| 5. Dew of Hermon                       | • REFRESHMENT |
| 6. Blessings commanded                 | • SUCCESS     |
| 7. Life forevermore                    | • ENDURANCE   |

## D. Covenant Is the Basis for Accountability

Home groups provide a reasonable vehicle for establishing a reasonable interactive accountability. Accountability is non-optional for every sincere Christian if they are to experience consistent success. “Exhort one another daily...lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Our home groups provide a basis for soft accountability, caring about what is happening in one another’s lives. “Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together...exhorting one another” (Heb 10:13). Accountability is essential for the “**one another**” commands to be operative in believer-with-believer’s relationships.

- 1) “Love one another” (John 13:34; 15:17)
- 2) “Be of the same mind one toward another” (Rom 12:16)
- 3) “Serve one another” (Gal 5:13)
- 4) “Provoke one another to love and good works” (Heb 10:24)
- 5) “Be kind one to another” (Eph 4:32)
- 6) “Submitting yourselves one to another” (Eph 5:12)
- 7) “Forbearing and forgiving one another” (Col 3:13)
- 8) “Admonishing one another” (Col 3:16)
- 9) “Comfort one another” (I Thess 5:11)
- 10) “Edify one another” (I Thess 5:11)
- 11) “Exhort one another” (Heb 3:13)
- 12) “Confess your faults one to another” (James 5:16)
- 13) “Pray for one another” (James 5:16)
- 14) “Having compassion one of another” (I Pet 3:8)
- 15) “Use hospitality one to another” (I Pet 4:9)

## E. Covenant Is a Life-flow Issue

There is a connection between loyalty and God’s life-flow. In Phil. 2:1-5, we are told to exhibit the attitude and mind of Christ. Why do we tend to argue and complain? Why do

we resent guidance and direction? God wants us to have a right attitude toward others. A connection exists between our ability to grow up and mature in Christ and the ability to demonstrate attitudes of love, respect, and loyalty toward others.

1. **Four Positive Qualities**: “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion” (vs. 1).

- a) Encouragement
- b) Comfort
- c) Fellowship
- d) Tenderness and compassion

2. **Four Pragmatic Actions**: “Then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose” (vs. 1-2).

- a) Like-minded
- b) Same love
- c) One in spirit
- d) One in purpose

3. **Four Destructive Attitudes**: “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, do everything without complaining or arguing...” (vs. 3, 14).

- a) Selfish ambition
- b) Vain conceit
- c) Complaining
- d) Arguing

4. **Four Constructive Stances**: “In humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation. . . (vs. 3, 4, 15).

- a) In humility, consider others better
- b) Look after the interests of others
- c) Blameless and pure
- d) Without fault

## **X. The Covenant Principles of Matthew 18**

We want to take a brief look at the covenant principles of relational integrity taught by Jesus himself in Matthew 18. Jesus clearly outlines the practices and attitudes vital to maintaining a sense of common life together. He speaks of **one central issue** in covenant community (vs. 1-2); **three fundamental attitudes** (vs. 3-5); and **seven guidelines** for the practice of covenant relationship (vs. 6-35).

## 1. One Central Issue in Covenant Community – Math 18:1-2

*“At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, **“Who then is greatest in the kingdom of heaven?”** 2 Then Jesus called a little child to Him, set him in the midst of them, 3 and said, **“Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven. 4 Therefore whoever humbles himself as this little child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.”**”*

a. Jesus began his discussion about covenant by responding to the disciples’ question: “Who is the **greatest** in the kingdom of heaven?” (Matt. 18:1). While the disciples want to talk about greatness in Christ’s kingdom, Jesus proceeds to talk about covenant and humility. At issue here is the idea of greatness vs. humility. To be great in the midst of covenant community life requires a certain sense of humility. Pride undermines true community.

b. How does one become great in the Kingdom of Heaven? The Kingdom of Heaven may be defined as the all-inclusive sphere of the **received authority** of Christ Jesus’ rule and dominion as Lord. It speaks of those who have humbled themselves and, in repentance of their own mind and heart, have submitted to the covenant, governmental and servanthood patterns of Christ. It is that special and significant spiritual order of ethical truth and empowering grace.

c. Kingdom life is covenant life, the opposite of lawlessness. Lawlessness is subtly expressed in many ways: division, strife, independence, resistance, gossip, character assassination. More overtly are stealing, murder, and lying. Lawlessness is often expressed in attitudes of independence and lawless actions. *“The secret power of lawlessness is already at work”* (2Thess 2:7). *“Many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other”* and *“the love of most will grow cold”* (Matt 24:10-12). *“In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did that which was right in his own eyes”* (Judges 21:25).

d. A Christian family or community is believers sharing their lives together in the Spirit’s power on a committed, sustained, sacrificial basis. The spirit of independence not only will destroy corporate purpose, but also will undermine the ability to see lives truly changed.

## 2. The Three Fundamentals of Covenant – Matt 18:3-5

Covenant relationships may be boiled down to three fundamental principles for human relationships as set forth by Jesus in Matt 18:3-5. The following portrayal must not be ignored. It is the basis of kingdom life and for Christian inter-personal and covenant relationships, for family life and for congregational life. The three fundamentals are as follows.

## **Fundamental Principle #1 - ATTITUDE CONVERSION**

*“**Except you change** and become like little children, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 18:3).*

The principle is found in the words “except you change.” The word “change” is the Greek *metanaeo* which literally means “repent, be converted,” or a change (meta) of mind (noeo). The basic problem of life is adult pride and the matter of self-rule. Anarchy and independence exist where people do not wish to come into agreement and into a willingness to walk in relationship. The requirement is simple. See and accept the need to humbly reorient one’s thinking and convert to a kingdom way of life. Humanistic society is selfish and ego-centered. The kingdom of heaven is comprised of people who have changed and teachable attitudes.

## **Fundamental Attitude #2 - VOLUNTARY HUMILITY**

*“Therefore, **whoever humbles himself** like this child is the greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven” (Matt. 18:4).*

The principle is found in the words “whoever humbles himself.” Relational integrity is possible when characterized by humility, even as seen and exhibited in Jesus’ life (Phil 2:1-11). As God’s children we have received His forgiveness. In a simple child-like way we should easily reconcile to one another and experience exchanges of forgiveness. Society has a way of subtly building into us false adult-learned patterns of ego superiority and the hypocrisies of self-pride. True Christianity requires the voluntary examination of prideful attitudes and a childlike willingness to humble one’s self and to become teachable.

## **Fundamental Principle #3 - MUTUAL ACCEPTANCE**

*“And **whoever welcomes** a little child like this in my name welcomes me” (Matthew 18:5).*

The principle is found in the words “whoever welcomes in my name.” Most people struggle in part with the real problems of inner rejection and many fear being rejected. It takes the grace of God to renounce and crucify the tendency to judge, super-evaluate and then reject other people. Two things are required to walk in relationships of mutual acceptance. (1) Be open to one another in Christ’s name. (2) Move from a focus on “my needs, my perspective, my convenience,” to focusing on “your needs, your perspective, your concerns.” In God’s agape love, I don’t try to change you; I accept you. Welcoming another is welcoming Christ.

How does one walk out these fundamental principles? In the rest of chapter 18 of Matthew, Jesus went on to describe seven practical rules that guide covenant relationships. If we faithfully discern and follow these rules of communication and interaction, loyal relationships will develop.

### 3. Seven Guidelines of Covenantal Loyalty - Matt 18:6-32

Jesus outlined what should guide the practice of loyal covenant and communication. If the rules of Matthew 18 are allowed to prevail, families and communities will be able to maintain fellowship, friendship and fruitfulness, and avoid futility, fights and the works of the flesh. Loyalty is closely related to the practical outworking of love. Jesus said, "If you love me obey my commands." The extent to which we buy into God's love by obedience to the express commands of Christ is an indication of the level of our commitment to one another. Matthew 18 outlines the commands of love and covenant relationship. Note the following seven rules.

#### **Rule Number 1 – PROTECT ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:6-8)**

*"6 Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea. 7 Woe to the world because of offenses! **For offenses must come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes!** 8 "If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire."*

A basic problem in relationships is insensitive wounding on the one hand and a failure to guard personal dignity on the other hand. Loyalty seeks to carefully guard the personal dignity of another person. "Offenses will come, but woe to that man by whom the offense comes" (18:7; compare with Prov 16:5, 6; Lev 19:17, 18; Eph 5:3, 4).

#### **Rule Number 2 – ESTEEM ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:9-11)**

*"9 And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire. 10 "**Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones,** for I say to you that in heaven their angels always see the face of My Father who is in heaven. 11 For the Son of Man has come to save that which was lost."*

We must not despise one another by falling into the problem of soulish judgmentalism. If we are always seeing things critically ("your eye causes you to sin") we should be careful. We must appreciate the ministry of angels who see our covenant offenses to one another and report to the Father who is in heaven (v. 10b). We seek to develop a character of esteeming one another, granting brotherly and sisterly favor, and developing a Christ-like sensitivity that avoids causing personal offenses.

#### **Rule Number 3 – RESTORE ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:12-14)**

*"12 What do you think? If a man has a hundred sheep, and one of them goes astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine and go to the mountains to **seek the one that is straying!** 13 And if he should find it, assuredly, I say to you, he rejoices more over that sheep than over the ninety-nine that did not go astray. 14*

*Even so it is not the will of your Father who is in heaven that one of these little ones should perish.”*

A basic lack in interpersonal relationships is isolation and a complacent selfishness. If one goes astray we should go and seek that one out. Jesus taught us to be seeking the welfare of each person and to maintain solidarity with the group, family or community. We practice a sense of solidarity that sacrificially seeks each individual's welfare (I Cor 12:12-27; Ezek 34:15-21). God is not willing that any perish in the stress of life.

#### **Rule Number 4 – CONFRONT ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:15-17)**

*15 Moreover **if your brother sins against you**, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. 16 But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that 'by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.' 17 And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.*

Sometimes in community life and interpersonal relationships the problem of breached faith and covenant offense occurs. We are committed to a biblical and Christ-like integrity in dealing with unresolved issues. We are as interested in resolving heart matters as merely solving attending symptom and issues.

What is needed is a procedure of communication that is true communication according to Jesus' four-fold procedure.

- 1) **COMMUNICATION** (one on one)  
Keep the matter private just between the primary parties.
- 2) **CLARIFICATION** (one with two or three)  
Ask for the help of others to gain an expanded viewpoint.
- 3) **CONFIRMATION** (one with a group)  
Counsel with the leadership of the congregation (Prov 13:10).
- 4) **NON-COMMUNION** (removed from the group)  
Cease association and fellowship on a personal fellowship basis.

#### **Rule Number 5 – UNIFY ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:18-20)**

*“18 Assuredly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again I say to you that **if two of you agree on earth** concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them.”*

Next, Jesus teaches us to avoid autonomous independence and to seek spiritual agreement in His name. What does it mean to seek unity and agreement within the

authority of heaven? Jesus advocates patient dialogue, counsel and prayer, seeking to come to a consensus characterized by the...

- 1) Power of Divine Authority (vs.18)
- 2) Power of United Agreement (vs.19)
- 3) Power of Jesus' Name (vs.20)

### **Rule Number 6 – FORGIVE ONE ANOTHER (Matthew 18:21-27)**

*“21 Then Peter said, **“Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?”** Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven. 23 Therefore the kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. 24 And when he had begun to settle accounts, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. 25 But as he was not able to pay, his master commanded that he be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and that payment be made. 26 The servant therefore fell down before him, saying, ‘Master, have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 27 The master was moved with compassion, released him, and forgave him the debt.”*

The key for maintaining covenant relationship is unconditional love, perpetual forgiveness, and genuine compassion. We are to grant to one another continuous forgiveness up to seventy times seven, 490 times. Peter Marshall defined forgiveness as “releasing another from my own personal judgment.” Relationship is maintained by sincerely granting continuous forgiveness (Eph. 4:32; Col. 3:13; Heb. 10:17; Mt. 6:14-15).

### **Rule Number 7 – SHOW MERCY TO ONE ANOTHER (Matt. 18:28-32)**

*“28 But that servant went out and found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, ‘Pay me what you owe!’ 29 So his fellow servant fell down at his feet and begged him, saying, ‘Have patience with me, and I will pay you all.’ 30 And he would not, but went and threw him into prison till he should pay the debt. 31 So when his fellow servants saw what had been done, they were very grieved, and came and told their master all that had been done. 32 Then his master, after he had called him, said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you begged me. 33 **Should you not also have had compassion on your fellow servant, just as I had pity on you?**’ 34 And his master was angry, and delivered him to the torturers until he should pay all that was due to him. 35 “So My Heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses.”*

Sometimes, people refuse to forgive, even after they have been forgiven by others and especially by God our Father. One who does not forgive will find themselves in a inner prison of resentfulness and tormenting memory. To avoid torment, one must reject an unmerciful approach to people (vs. 30) and learn to grant restitution (vs.33).



# Stages of Matthew 18 Communication

As Applied to All Believers Using Matthew 18:15-18  
 As Applied to Pastors and Elders Using I Timothy 5:17-25

## Matthew 18 Communication Focuses Toward Reconciliation

"Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother when he sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy times seven." (Mt 8:21, 22).

### Stage One

#### PROVING

COMMUNICATE  
ONE-ON-ONE  
To Win Your Brother

SATISFIED

"If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you will have won your brother over." (Mt. 18:15; Prov 15:30-31).

### Stage Two

#### PROVING

CLARIFY  
TWO-OR-THREE  
To Establish Issues

CONVINCED

"If he will not listen, take one or two others along, that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses." (Mt 1:1; Deut 9:15; Prov 15:31, 32)

"If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." (Mt 18:17; Prov 15:32)

### Stage Three

#### PROVING

CONFRONTATION  
CHURCH COUNSEL  
To Confirm Truth

ASSURED

#### FIRST STEP

"Do not rebuke an elder harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father." (I Tim 5:1)

#### SECOND STEP

"Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses." (5:17, 18)

#### THIRD STEP

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others may fear." (5:20)

### Stage Four

#### IN WORLD

CESSATION OF  
FELLOWSHIP  
To Save the Soul  
and Spirit

NO  
MORE  
TALK

"If he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a heathen or a tax collector." (Matt 18:18).

## I Timothy 5:17-25 Process for Congregational Leaders