

# Notes for the Ekklesia Meeting

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## Holy Huddles

by Dan Trygg

"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls. <sup>42</sup> And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer... <sup>44</sup> And all those who had believed were together, and had all things in common; <sup>45</sup> and they *began* selling their property and possessions, and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. <sup>46</sup> And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, <sup>47</sup> praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." Acts 2:41,42,44-47

"Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, <sup>4</sup> who risked their own necks for my life, to whom not only do I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles; <sup>5</sup> also greet the church that is in their house." Romans 16:3-5

"Greet the brethren who are in Laodicea and also Nympha and the church that is in her house." Colossians 4:15

"...to Philemon our beloved brother and fellow worker, <sup>2</sup> and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house..." Philemon 1:1-2

Sometimes you will hear people use the phrase "holy huddle" in a negative way. They are referring to the gathering of a group of religious people, but they often speak with disdain about them, because they think that those people have a "holier-than-thou" attitude toward outsiders. This may be an *assumption* on their part, or it may be based on a negative interaction with someone from that group. Sadly, there is way too much arrogance and hypocrisy among religious people. Of course, the enemy, the slanderer, is quick to exploit any opportunity to defame the cause of Christ.

The term, "holy huddle", actually *is* an apt description of the main methodology used by Jesus and the early church to establish new believers in their faith, to provide instruction and support for the people of God, to interface with the outside world and to spread the movement abroad. The term, "holy" just means "set apart" or "dedicated" to God, and the word, "huddle" refers to a "group" or "gathering of people". So a "holy huddle" would simply mean a gathering of people who are set apart for God. In our modern day usage a "huddle" also is used in football for a gathering of players to strategize, plan and coordinate the next play of the game. This strong, purposeful sense of the word is similar to the flavor of the NT Greek term for "church". That word, *ekklesia*, referred to a caucus or gathering of people *called out for a purpose*. It was not just a social gathering. There was direction and purpose for their meetings. Not only was there instruction, honest sharing, and relationship building, but there was also seeking God's face, sharing of needs and opportunities to pray about and consider. As a group, they strategized and prayed about how they could help one another and reach out into the community, and beyond.

This methodology was exemplified by Jesus. Out of the larger group of His contacts and relationships, Jesus chose His small group of disciples to share a deeper level of instruction and intimate time with Him. They were Jesus' "holy huddle". This was not just a gathering of friends, however. There was *purpose* to being a member of this group. These men were being trained for something. They were "set apart" from the larger group of followers, and were given more access and "face time" with Jesus, so that they could be trained and prepared to faithfully represent Him to the outside world. This was clearly stated by Jesus. They knew that this was what being a member of this group was all about. They were called "apostles", which meant "representatives, delegates, envoys".

This was such an effective experience for the apostles that they immediately instituted the same kind of small group dynamic in Jerusalem after Pentecost. Just like Jesus had the crowds of people who followed Him, many who were *only curious* about what was happening, in the same way there were crowds of people who were gathering in the temple to hear the apostles teach, and to witness the signs and wonders God worked through them. The apostles had witnessed the shallowness of many of the large group followers. They were often "fair weather followers", not seriously committed disciples. The crowd was not an effective setting to answer questions, nor did it offer the level of personal relationship necessary to provide accountability or personal correction and encouragement. When 3,000 people came to trust in Jesus at Pentecost, the apostles immediately gave instructions to divide them up into home meetings. There, people could become personally known, more intensive and practical training could be offered, and the people could have a more private setting to share needs and to seek God in prayer. As they grew in the Spirit, this setting also offered a place where they could share the gifts and insights God was giving to them for the people in their group. In I Cor. 14:26, we have a glimpse into what was expected at a fully-functioning meeting, "What is it, then, brothers and sisters? When you assemble, *each one* has a psalm, has a teaching, has a revelation, has a tongue, has an interpretation. Let all things be done for edification." The purpose was to build

people up and strengthen their faith. Note that *everyone* was expected to come with something to share. It was a meeting where they could take risks and put their faith into practice.

We have another glimpse into church life in Ephesians 4:12-16. Again, it is clearly taught that *everyone* was to be prepared for the work of service, for building up the Body of Christ. Verses 15 and 16 are especially insightful as to *how* this was to happen, "...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up all things into Him, who is the head, *even* Christ,"<sup>16</sup> out from whom the whole Body, being fitted-together and knitted-together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love." There are three main ideas: (1.) *We, the members of the Body, are to "grow up all things into Christ", and we cause the growth of the Body to build itself up in love.* We do this *as* we speak and demonstrate truth to one another in love and *as* we function according to our spiritual gifts. (2.) *All of this ministry comes "out from the Head, Christ",* as He directs the members to act, and supplies the resources, gifts and empowerment for growth to happen. (3.) *It happens as we are knitted together and fitted together, which is a picture of close interaction and relationship.* As we read the NT, it is clear that the only time this kind of openness of heart is described is in Acts 2. There, it is specifically mentioned as a by-product of the quality time spent in the home group setting. Note what grew out of that interaction in that context. People began to spontaneously share their goods with one another, as they became aware of one another's needs. This caused joy and celebration in the group, and they were filled with praise to God. Furthermore, their practical ministry, and their overflowing joy did not go unnoticed by others. The text says that they, "...had favor with all the people..." Consequently, the Lord was adding to their number day-by-day those who were being saved. **As effective love-ministry happens within the Body outsiders take note, recognize that it is good, and are drawn to Christ.** Interestingly, the same Priscilla and Aquila who later had a home church in Rome (Rom. 16:3-8) were the ones who started working with the church in Ephesus (Acts 18:18-21). Paul had met them in Corinth (Acts 18:1-3), but when he left to return to Jerusalem at the end of his second missionary journey, they went with him. When ministry opened up at Ephesus, Paul left them in charge as he went on to Jerusalem. As he wrote to the Corinthians, however, he sends greetings from them to their former friends at Corinth, saying, "...the churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Prisca greet you heartily in the Lord, *with the church that is in their house*" (1 Corinthians 16:19). From this, **we know that the church at Ephesus was a "holy huddle" in a home.**

Sometimes people think that football huddles are settings where only one-way communication takes place. Not so. The players report back to the quarterback if they see any weaknesses in the other team's defense. The coach on the sidelines will also send in direction from his vantage point. **There is feedback, coordinated planning, direction and assignments given, encouragement and exhortation. If the players are properly conditioned and disciplined, if they know their plays and can follow direction, if they execute well what they are supposed to do, the team can be a force to be reckoned with.** Poor conditioning, lack of team coordination or discipline, arguing or posturing over who is going to do what, inability or unwillingness to follow instruction, not knowing what to do or not following the rules of the game will create confusion, incompetence, penalties and disaster for the team. This is obvious to almost anyone. All that is at stake here is a *game*. It is about moving the ball down the field and scoring points. **Why should we think that the church should require less discipline, training, forethought and preparation than a football team?** The stakes are infinitely higher. Peoples' lives and eternal destinies are at stake. We are not playing some part-time high school after school squad, either. Our opposition is working full time. They are a highly disciplined and coordinated team. They have generations of experience, and they play *dirty*! They try to hurt and damage us to get us out of the game for good. In fact, this is not a *game*, it is *warfare*!

**A team is only as good as its players.** There is a lot of preparation that goes into making an effective team. **Teams of players are not developed by watching other people play. In order for the church to become effective, we must take seriously that we need to be trained, developed and disciplined.** We need to come to grips with the fact that the opposition truly comes to steal, kill and destroy *us*, and *those we love*. **We must put time and effort into studying the Word, seeking and obeying God so that we will be able to bring something with us to share with our brothers and sisters.** We must take seriously our responsibility to help others grow, and challenge one another to love and good deeds. We must become advocates for obedience, and not make excuses for living a sub-standard life. **God's plan was to use small groups to train and develop His people to become players, ...even soldiers. We have become so enamored with the big meeting, the glitzy event, that we have ignored the basic building block of the Church, the small training group.** We must return to being disciples discipling faithful people who will disciple others (II Tim. 2:2). God has called *us* out for the game, but most of us come with our popcorn and pennant, instead of our pads and helmets. Most of us sit in the stands. We don't even make it to the *bench*, ...much less out to the *field*.