



THE GATHERING

CONNECTING PEOPLE AND CHRIST

Cell Groups

(2nd, 4th and 5th Sundays)

Springbrook: 9:30 AM at the Springbrook Municipal Building, call Kevin and Kelly Kehoe (613) 395-4346

Stirling: 10:00 AM at 25 Demorest Rd, call Beth and Bill Devries at (613) 395-0227

Belleville: 9:30 AM at 39 Cooke Ct, call Jack and Jan Harris at (613) 967-6419

Kingston: (Sunday evenings) 1338 Princess St, call Terry and Dawn Harris at (613) 531-5283

Youth: (Wednesday evenings), 7:00 PM at the Hub, downtown Stirling, call Beth Devries at (613) 395-0227

Other Opportunities

Study of Daniel, Tuesdays 7:00 PM, 38 Mount Pleasant Rd, Stirling, call Esther Noel at (613) 395-3402

Men's breakfast at the Hub. Every Saturday, 7:30 to 9:00 AM, call Barry Cooper at 613-395-5990

Jesus, The core of our alignment *Mark Norman*

Recently, I was talking to someone about our church family. This person was thinking about joining us and I felt compelled to warn him about the messiness of hanging out with us. When he inquired further, I told him about our diverse backgrounds (Catholic, Baptist, Brethren...), the different streams of spirituality in our midst: some are people of the Word, they thrive and feel God speaking to them when they study the Bible, others thrive and feel alive when they see and sense the Holy Spirit moving in our meetings, yet others come alive when they are involved in feeding the poor and taking care of very practical needs of people and some thrive on sharing the "Good News" in very direct ways.

I also told him of our attempts to move out into the community, some cells are sponsoring a Coffee House, another, forging relationships in a local bar, one is ministering to the families of prisoners and one is working with children. Trying to describe the diversity of such a small group was pretty interesting. He had a few other

questions that were also quite perceptive. He asked me how we dealt with diversity, trust and membership. Somewhere behind these questions, I picked up on a need to feel safe if ever he decided to hang his hat with us. Here are some thoughts that came to mind following our conversation.

The first is pretty simple and stems from my ecology background: Messiness is a sign of life; too much order is a sign of death. The health of ecosystems is predicated on diversity, when an ecosystem is too uniform, it is increasingly vulnerable to disease and infestations and can disappear. As a mentor once put it to me, life is messy. So I guess there is a lot of life in the Gathering. The second thought stemmed from my friend's concern with trust and membership. I can easily see where he was coming from. He may have been looking at us and seeing all of the

outward differences and, honestly, having trouble figuring out how to fit in. The question of fitting in used to be easily answered. Many of us came from backgrounds in which it was easy to tell who was in and who was on the edge. See *Sets on p. 3*



Upcoming Events

January 21: Teen coffee house, 7:00PM at the Train Station in Stirling, for info: Ashley Vader (613) 395-2228

February 1: Gord Martin from Vision Ministries will be speaking at The Gathering

February 20-22: **Men's weekend getaway at Pinecliff Resort in Combermere, contact Barry Cooper (613) 395-5990**

April 3-5: **Women's weekend getaway at Pinecliff Resort, contact Christine Cooper (613) 395-5990**

Just Down – Not Off! by Lisa Barber

“I am convinced” Esther exclaimed as she jumped to her feet, **“that we fall down, but we do not fall off.”**

In October Esther was served divorce papers that included allegations that threatened to throw her whole life into loss and chaos.

“I went directly into a place of fear.” Esther recalled. “I began to wonder what I had done wrong to deserve this or why God was allowing it. I began to doubt so many things about myself and about **God’s love. It was a terrible place to be.”**

“Then,” continued Esther **“God began to speak to me** through verses like Proverbs 24:16,

For though a righteous man falls seven times, he rises again, but the wicked (not the righteous) are brought down by calamity. And Proverbs 16:1, To man belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the reply of the tongue. Otherwise, no matter what is happening in my life, because I belong to Him, He will have the last word – He is in control.”

“John 15:1- 4 also speaks **about this.”** Esther sat down again with a Bible in her hands. **“Jesus said, “I am the true vine and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does**



Esther enjoys a beautiful winter day outside her home in Stirling, Ontario

bear fruit he trims clean so that it will be even more fruitful...No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in me.” **It does not say that if ‘I’ do the right things then God will prune me and make me fruitful. No, Jesus says that if I am in Him he will prune me. He is the Gardner. He is taking responsibility to ensure my life is fruitful.”**

“It has been so freeing to realize that I am on the right path and will remain on the right path. My heart delights in His Ways and I am His. I no longer need to worry whether I am always doing or saying the right things. I have

total confidence that He is in control and that He can guide my every step. Yes, I can be knocked and fall down – but nothing can separate me from God nor snatch me out of His Hand nor His plan. (Rom 8:28 - 39, John 10:28 – 29).” A chimney fire quickly tested **Esther’s new perspective on** life. By the time the fire was

out sixteen firemen had tromped through her home and had given her the news that an inspection and repairs could potentially cost thousands of dollars*. This time, instead of going to that place of fear and worry, Esther turned to the knowledge that her life was hid in Christ and that this was the path laid out for her. Firmly believing that Jesus would somehow work out the situation she carried on with her day. Later that evening one of her family members remarked how surprised he was that she was in such good spirits after having **such a stressful day. “The fact is,”** explained Esther, **“it had not been a stressful day at all.”**

As Esther was passionately talking about this life-changing revelation Ps 37:23,24 kept running through my mind: *The Lord delights in the way of the person whose steps he has made firm; though they stumble, they will not fall, for the Lord upholds them with his hand.* Yes, there will be trouble and there will be good times. **(See “Not Off” on page 4)**

Men’s Weekend Getaway

Date: February 20th through to 22 *Location:* Pinecliff Resort Combermere Ontario Age of Majority Event Currently have space for 12 people (6 booked already) Meal groups to be assigned Indoor pool, hot tub, games room, winter outdoor sports, snowmobile trails, fellowship. Bring your instruments for the Saturday night jam secession! Deposit required to hold place, expected cost \$40.00 per night for more resort info : www.pinecliff.com Contact Barry Cooper at (613) 395-5990

Women’s Weekend Getaway

Date: April 3-5 *Location:* Pinecliff Resort, Combermere Ontario Contact Christine Cooper at (613) 395-5990

Sets ... Continued from p. 1

We just looked at the apparent behaviours and outward signs. In my case, when I came to Christ, the church I was attending had a few ways of figuring who was a really serious follower of Christ.

The list was pretty straightforward: Say the sinners prayer, cut my hair, be at the services on Sunday and Wednesday, tithe, wear a suit, add some amen's and praise the Lord's to my vocabulary, memorize Scripture and call the music we sang Hymns instead of songs. If I did all of that, I was in. Not too complicated, but

from my immature eyes, these things didn't have much to do with the Gospel but more to do with cultural preferences that this group felt comfortable with. Little did I know, I was dealing with what is called a "Bounded Set" mentality. People cared a lot about the external signs of belonging and used those to gauge my walk with Christ. If you look at the illustration, bounded sets have a clear boundary that is usually well defined.

As Alan Hirsch puts it: "In the bounded set, it is clear who is in and who is out, based on well-defined boundaries such as culturally accepted behaviours or very specific theological lines of thinking. But bounded sets don't have much of a core definition beyond these boundaries. They are hard at the edges, soft at the center like a ranches with fences put up in order to keep cattle in or out." The focus of groups that operate with bounded sets is to get you in, once you're in, your internal direction isn't all that critical as long as you maintain the outward appearances.

In my heart, I sensed that Jesus probably loved these people dearly but wasn't excited about the way they were measuring inclusion and growth. In fact, a lot of what we know about Jesus indicates that things like that really upset him. Think of his reaction to people who looked great on the outside but whose hearts weren't oriented towards grace. Think of Jesus' comments to the Pharisees in Matthew 23: 15-28. He actually called them "blind, fools, hypocrites, and whitewashed tombs". He didn't mince words. His main problem with them was the gap between outward religious compliance and the inward disconnect from the grace that flowed from connection with God. Conversely, think of the examples he used to highlight true God centered spirituality. Go back to the story of the Samaritan taking care of his vowed enemy

(Luke 10), the father receiving his prodigal son (Luke 15) or the woman quietly making an offering that clearly cost her dearly (Luke 21). To Jesus, the heart mattered so much more than what showed on the outside. The stories he used to teach his disciples what it meant to follow God clearly put an emphasis on hearts changed by grace rather than on behaviours used to comply.

Here's is a way of looking at it: It's called centered sets. Again, according to Hirsch: "The centered set is like a ranch with the wellspring at its center. It has very strong ideology at the center but no boundaries. It is hard at the center, soft at the edges. We suggest that in the centered set lies a real clue to the structuring of missional communities in the emerging culture."

Notice in the illustration how in centered sets, the line of inclusion is related to the direction of the arrows. Those pointing towards the cross are inside the line, those pointing away are outside. This is an attempt to illustrate the concept. In centered sets, the line moves to include the dots based on their direction. In churches that work from the centered set, the emphasis is put on the direction of people's hearts, not on the outward appearance of compliance to lists of do's and don'ts.

How does all of this fit with us?

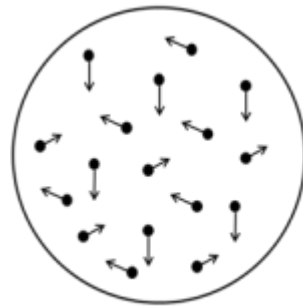
If we are a centered set church:

We seek to encourage people to connect with God in a way that changes and transforms them into the likeness of Christ (see Ephesians 4: 15)

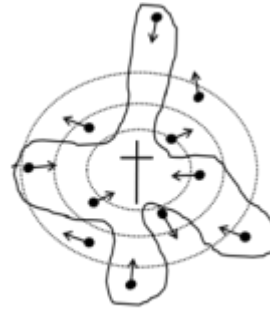
We are, as Mike Frost puts it, "hard on the center and soft on the edges". We highly emphasise and hold to the centrality of Christ for our salvation and spiritual vitality while understanding that God is responsible for transforming people. We are all in a process of transformation and exercise patience and humility as we help each other on the journey of drawing near to God.

We constantly check our practices to make sure we don't major in the minors and don't put a higher value on lists of "Christian" behaviours and practices that may have more to do with our preferences than the Gospel of Christ.

We sink wells instead of building fences providing a sustaining connection with water instead of building barriers to keep others out. We allow people to come to Jesus from any direction and from any distance. The Person of Jesus stands...at the center.

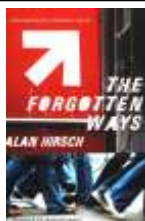


Bounded Set



Centered Set

Looking for good related books to read?



The Forgotten Ways,
Alan Hirsch



The Lost Message of Jesus
Steve Chalk and Alan Mann



UnChristian
David Kinnaman

Not Off (Continued from page 2)

And yes, we will make wrong decisions that will lead to harsh consequences. We also continue to wrestle with unbelief, false beliefs and sin. But as followers of Christ we cannot, for a moment, believe that these can separate us from God and throw us off the path He has put us on. Whether we are experiencing good times or trials, intimacy with God or disappointment with God – we can know that God is delighting in us, blessing us, sustaining us and working out His plans in us. We cannot fall off of God's Path of love, of blessing, of acceptance, of protection and of growth. We may fall down but we are firmly in His care and He enables us to get back on our feet.

So when we fall into trials or into sin, what we believe about our relationship with God in those moments will make all the difference.

Again Esther jumped to her feet, "Jesus is the Way. The path of our lives is Jesus. He is our path! We cannot fall off of it. How amazing is that?"

With Esther we can shout "Hallelujah"!

** As Esther anticipated, all costs and labour related to fixing her chimney have been wonderfully worked out.*

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Thanks to Josiah Gilman 01-18-2008

**TODAY'S SERMON WILL BE ON HOW TO DRESS
MODESTLY IN AN INCREASINGLY IMMODEST AGE**

What lessons are you learning that are resulting in love, faith and action in your life? Would you be willing to share your story?

Contact me at

lisa.barber@iteams.org

613-395-1276

Who is doing what at The Gathering?

- Working with the youth: Beth Devries, (613) 395-0227
- Intercession: Jane Aman (613) 395-3869
- Pastoral care: Alicia Lott (613) 395-5342 , Jan Harris, (613) 967-6419
- **Phone Chain: Avril O'Brien (613) 478-6461, Esther Noel (613) 395-3402**
- Worship/Music: Sandy Norman (613) 398-8695, Bill Devries (613) 395-0227
- Technical Gear: Kevin Kehoe (613) 395-4346 , Barry Cooper (613) 395-5990
- Projection and computers: Vince Brintnell (613) 395-0613