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Why You Should Join a Small Group
or (Commies in the Bible)
Acts 2

Is there anybody in Denver, Colorado, of sound mind and body who doesn't know the Broncos won the Super Bowl? Why is it that I have this need, that we all have this need to buy all this stuff that proclaims the Broncos won the Super Bowl? Why did my son have to run to the door, open it, and scream, "*Broncos won the Super Bowl.*"

Why did Mom have to call me and say, "*What do you think of those Broncos?*" Why do we go to Bronco parties and say, "*The Broncos won the Super Bowl*"? You turn to someone at the party and say, "*They won!*" They know they won, so why do we do that? (Pretty awesome, the Broncos, but enough about the Broncos for now.)

We're studying the Book of Acts--this is church, remember? Before we even started it, I talked with Gary, and we said we really need a message about small groups. We need to get people hooked up in small groups. I said, "*That's cool, because in the Book of Acts, Chapter 2, there is the greatest picture of the church and small groups structure of anywhere in the Bible.*" (So I'm sure when we get to Acts, Chapter 2, I'll be able to come up with a good sermon as to why you should sign up for small groups.)

In Acts, Chapter 2, as you know, the Holy Spirit comes and falls on the church. In Verse 4 Luke says this: "*All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard them speaking in his own language.*"

And Luke goes on to list all the different languages and countries and the people from these countries. "*...Cretans and Arabs--we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!*" Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, "*What does this mean?*" It's probably a good question, what does this mean? If you've studied the Bible much, you may say, "*Hey, this story seems kind of familiar. In fact, this is a familiar story, just backwards.*"

Remember in Genesis, Chapter 11, all the people of the world spoke the same language? They gathered together on a plain in the east and they said to each other, (paraphrase) "*Let's build a tower to heaven to make a name for ourselves.*" Weirder still, God looks down from heaven and says, "*Check it out, one language. This is only the beginning of what they'll do. Nothing will be impossible for them, so we better go down and bust it up, make 'em speak a bunch of different languages and scatter them over the face of the earth.*" That's the story of the Tower of Babel.

And Pentecost is the story of the Tower of Babel backwards. Heaven comes down, but not to scatter the languages, to unify the languages. And Jesus says nothing is going to

be impossible for these people. Nothing's impossible for you in Jesus. These people are going to build the very kingdom of God on earth.

Together in the Lord they build the kingdom of God, but get this: *Together in our own strength, people are an evil threat.*

Yet one thing is clear: *Joining together in groups definitely gives us power and strength like 3 cords brought together.* That is why we should come together in groups to learn each other's language, to be bound together in unity, to build a tower toward heaven. Well, might not God come down and just blast half the group with Spanish or Portuguese, and make a move to the Canary Islands?

Is that why we should come together in small groups? These believers in Acts, Chapter 2, came together in such a way that to bystanders they appeared drunk. Now if you've ever seen a really good small group whose inhibitions are dropped and they share the joy of the Lord, they might appear drunk. I remember our youth group in high school--a bunch of kids that came to know the Lord. We had so much fun, sometimes I remember other kids at school looking at us going, *"Those guys are drunk."*

We appeared drunk. Peter stands up in Acts Chapter 2, Verse 14, and says to the crowd, *"Fellow Jews and all of you that live in Jerusalem... listen carefully to what I say. These guys aren't drunk as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel:*

In the last days God says I will pour out my spirit on all people.

And then Peter quotes Joel, Verse 22: *"Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him."*

And then he quotes King David: Verse 31: *"Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. For David didn't ascend to heaven, and yet he said,*

*The Lord said to my Lord:
'Sit at my right hand
Until I make your enemies
A footstool for your feet.'*

'Therefore, let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.'

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brothers, what shall we do?'

Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.' With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' Those who accepted his message were baptized and about 3,000 were added to their number (of 120) that day.'

And now here's the great model of the church and its small group structure: *"They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common.*

Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

It's quite a picture. They met together 3120 some odd people. They met together in the temple courts and in each other's homes in small groups. And there in those places:

Number one, they ate together. They broke bread together.

Number two, they fellowshiped together by devoting themselves to the apostles teaching.

Number three, they also devoted themselves to prayer, sharing all things in common.

All we ask of you in a small group at Lookout Mountain Community Church is that you do those three things in some form:

Number One--that you'd goof off together, fellowship together, eat together, and break bread together and that you'd grow together.

Number two--devote yourself to some form of the apostles teaching, biblical study.

Number three—Grace together, that you'd pray for each other. Share your lives with each other, encourage each other through prayer, hopefully sharing all things in common.

We have mixed groups, men's groups, women's groups, and youth groups. We ask everyone to be part of some small group.

It's how we as a body are coordinated and joined together, connected in strength and power, each part working together for the whole. Isn't that why we should join together

in small groups? And it's how we grow. Iron sharpens iron. God Himself speaks through the conduit of His people.

It's in that crucible of community that our love is tested, refined and purified. It's there that the spell of our solitary conceit is shattered on the anvil of love. Isn't that why we should join together in small groups? (And it's how we witness to the world about justice and truth.)

And just as Jerusalem looked together at the early church, the world would look together at us and say, "*Look at those people--they share all things in common. Look at that justice, look at that testimony. They testify to the fact that certainly this world of ours, the kingdom of the United States of America, is not the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. They share all things in common.*"

Each owns the whole; no one owns anything of themselves. Think of that vision, think of that justice, and think of that beauty. All together, one body, all things in common, every need met, a perfect society, a collective with no private property. And justice is enforced. Isn't that why we should join together in small groups sharing all in common? What a great picture.

And yet that picture's kind of familiar too, isn't it? But the familiar picture isn't all that great. We're at the end of the 20th century, and I think this century will probably be known for an incredible experiment known as *Communism*. Led by Karl Marx, it was an experiment wherein individuals are joined together for the strength of the whole, so they would grow into a new society, their *Communist Utopia*.

Joined together, without private property, they would share all in common in such a way that all needs are met. And the *Proletariat*, the workers of the world, would rise up and rush in to join this *Communist Utopia*. Rush in. Just as all Jerusalem looked at the early church and had such favor for them. And the Lord added to their numbers every day.

Quite a vision, quite an experiment! Only problem was that it failed, utterly. It was like the Lord himself looked down from heaven and said, "*We'd better bust that up.*" And I'm glad he did.

The most depressing place I've ever been in my life was in former Communist Romania.

Literally you would walk around and look in people's eyes, and almost everyone appeared as if they'd just been raped. The country was surrounded with barb wire and guard towers, not to keep the workers, the *Proletariat*, from rushing in, *but to keep them from rushing out*. I believe the greatest evils that this world has ever seen happened in the 20th century. Talk about Hitler and 6 million Jews. That's nothing compared to Stalin—what is it like 60 million—something like that, just in the Soviet Union, that doesn't count China and all those other places.

Karl Marx had quite a vision, but he tried to build the kingdom of God--*without the King*. He tried to build with the strength of men. That is he tried to build a tower to heaven like

Babel, but he didn't build a tower to heaven--he just built a pit for hell. That's really great, because I'm supposed to preach on why you're supposed to join a small group.

So why are you supposed to join a small group? So that we would be strengthened and empowered together for growth, for justice? Those are beautiful things to be a witness to the world to the truth of Jesus. Those are good and wonderful things, but is that why? Is it because I, the pastor, get up and say, "You really need to be in a small group? We're going to have a law at this church that everybody has to be in a small group!"

So you feel kind of guilty about the whole thing, and you say, "*Dang it, I'm just going to do it, I'm going to carve out the time and I'm going to do it by the strength of my will!*" Aren't we then kind of building little towers of Babel, little communes here and there--enforced with guilt rather than guns--but still reaping death or boredom, and not life?

So why should you join a small group? As I looked at Acts, Chapter 2, the greatest model of a small group in scripture, I realized it doesn't say you should join a small group. Peter says this: You should repent and be baptized. And then you will be filled with the spirit. And then you will begin to really believe that all things are yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's. And believing that you are intoxicated with the very Spirit of God.

It's like it's begging this question: *Wouldn't you want to join a small group?* Kind of like when the Broncos win the Super Bowl. Why should you call your mother? Why should you run to the door and scream, "*The Broncos won the Super Bowl!*" Why should you go down to the paraphernalia distribution center and buy tee shirts that say the Broncos won, to wear in front of other people wearing tee shirts that say the Broncos won.

Why should you do that? Why should you go to a Bronco party? Why should you scream at the top of your lungs? Why should you join together with the people in your family, like we did at ours, and dance around the room? You know high five'n and having a party. Why should you? I don't know if it's so much that you should, but don't you want to?

The more I looked at Acts, Chapter 2, this week, the more I kept thinking of something Thomas Aquinas said or wrote: "*Sheer joy is God's and this demands companionship.*"

"I have come that my joy might be in you," said Jesus, "*and that your joy might be full.*" And the Spirit of Jesus descended upon the church and demanded companionship. So powerful they appeared drunk, and they shared all things all common. *Joy demands companionship.* You know that.

Have you ever climbed a 14,000 foot peak on a Saturday when there are all these people from all kinds of different places that don't know each other climbing to the summit? You go up the trail and everybody's breathing hard and working. No one really talks to each other, but you get to the top and something amazing happens.

You're all standing there and you just can't help it. You go, "*This is awesome!*" They look at you and go "*It is awesome!*" And then what happens? You share your trail mix, right? And then you say, "*Where are you from?*" And you share your story. And you start talking about how beautiful it is. You both see how beautiful it is, and a little party breaks out on top of the mountain. *Because sheer joy, that kind of wonder, that kind of awe, demands companionship.*

A couple of summers ago I climbed Greys and Torres alone. When I got to the top, all I could think about was all of you. That's so weird. I remember thinking: *We've got to get the whole church up here.* And I tried to figure out how we could do that. I don't know if that will work, but *joy demands companionship.*

When the Broncos won the Super Bowl, someone turned to you and said, "*Pass the bean dip,*" and what did you say? "*Well sure!*
The Broncos just won the Super Bowl. Have more bean dip! Have a coke, have my wallet." It demands a party. And when I got married, I did what you did. We called everyone we knew and said, "*Would you come party with us?*" And I told you about it. I was so enamored with my bride, so full of joy, it was like I was drunk. I was forgetting everything, including how much the party cost. *But sheer joy demands companionship.* It would be as if you lost a five hundred-dollar bill. You're looking through your house and you're cleaning everything. Finally you find the five hundred-dollar bill. What do you do? You call your friends and say, "*I found the money. Come party with me.*"

Or if you're a shepherd, and you lost one of your sheep, you left the other 99 in the wilderness, and you went out to find the lost one. You're so glad you found it, what do you do? You call your neighbor and say, "*Come party with me. I've found the sheep that was lost.*"

What if you're a dad and your son rebels against you? He breaks your heart. He goes off to a distant country and you long for him. You wait for him for years and he comes back to you. And you receive him safe and sound. What do you do? You order a side of beef, right? You have a bar-be-que. You call everybody on your block and say, "*Come party with me.*" Why? *Because sheer joy demands companionship.*

When we were in seminary, we used to talk about philosophy. We'd ask: *Why did God create anything?* It's a good question. Was he lacking for something? I don't think so. Did someone make him do it? Did he have to do it? Did someone force God to do it? Who would that have been? Why did God make anything? The orthodox answer, the best answer, the biblical answer, I believe, is: *He created everything out of his fullness.*

"*From his fullness,*" John says, "*we have received grace upon grace.*" He created out of sheer joy, and that joy somehow demanded or implied companionship. Or better yet, we have a giddy creator and he wanted to party. And he made us in his image. The image of a giddy creator.

And so his very first commandment given to Adam and Eve, given to our parents, before the fall, when obedience was not toil, the commandment, I believe, he takes with the utmost seriousness, and the commandment which our enemy, Satan, hates more than any-
-the commandment which reflects his image as the creator was this: *Be fruitful and multiply.*

That was the first one. *And in this fallen world, that commandment is guarded within the sanctuary of marriage. The physical side of that commandment is guarded within the sanctuary of marriage, where the husband gives all to his wife uninhibited.*

And the bride gives all to her husband uninhibited. And that is not toil. That's joy. And the fruit of that joy is a baby, *in the image of God.* You can't even make that baby without joy, very easily. (You don't even need to get into technicalities there.) But that's incredible. Because what is that? I think that's a picture of obedience from before the fall. *Your wish is my joy.*

And now you see for all of us, whether you're married or not, it's a picture of Christ and his bride the church. The physical just a picture of the spiritual. *At Pentecost, the very spirit of Christ came down upon the bride and impregnated her with life.* And that joy bears fruit. What kind of fruit? Love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, joy bearing more joy. And that is not toil.

On my honeymoon, I began to obey God's very first commandment, be fruitful and multiply. And it wasn't toil. Nobody had to come up and say to me "*Peter, now you listen to the word of God. I'm telling you: No TV tonight. You better do it.*" I wanted to. But now get this: If someone came along outside of that covenant, that commitment, and said, "*You're going to,*" and forced it, do you know what that would be called? *Rape.*
Isn't that weird?

Jesus will not rape you, Bride of Christ.
Satan will.
Communism will.
The Babylonians will.
But not Jesus.

In his Spirit is fullness of joy and the joy bears fruit. *Sheer joy is God's and this demands companionship.* Maybe the whole story of the whole Bible is really this: *God looking for a party.* Looking for someone that would freely share his joy with him. Think of it. Why he ever created in the first place. Why he went for a walk in the garden in the cool of the day saying, "*Adam where are you? Adam what happened to you?*" Why he chose a people for himself. He didn't have to do that.

Why did he do that?

In order that he could bless them. And then send his Son. His very first inaugural miracle was changing water into wine at a party. *Would someone drink this wine with*

me?

And the stories in scripture, over and over again: *Lost coin would somebody rejoice with me? Lost sheep would someone party with me, would somebody rejoice with me? Lost son, I received him back, would you come to the party?*

And the great banquet he throws and says, *“Would you come? No, you’re too busy. With yourself.”* And then before he left, he sat at a table with his friends, body broken, blood shed, and he gave them his all.

But why would he do that? He said this at the end of that dinner, *“I’m telling you truly, I won’t drink again of the fruit of the vine until I drink it with you in my father’s kingdom.”* And that is a party.

Why did he come, why did he die, why did he suffer?

Hebrews tells us it was for the joy that was set before him.

And what is that joy? *His bride.*

Some said, *“He’s a glutton and a drunkard. He eats with tax collectors and sinners. You drunkard.”* Do you remember what Jesus said? He said a lot of things, but one thing he said, *“We pipe to you and you wouldn’t dance. We threw a banquet for you, and you wouldn’t come. We killed the fatted calf and we partied, but you wouldn’t leave the field and come to my party.”*

And in the end we know it was those religious people who crucified our Lord. And I think it was very much in a large part due to this: *His joy was such an incredible threat to them.*

Real joy is a threat in a fallen world.

It’s a threat to self, like marriage is a threat to self.

You own your pleasures. You can go buy a TV. You own your potato chips, and you own your pack of beer.

But real joy owns you.

I think people are scared of joy, deep joy and wonder. Alice had to get small to enter wonderland, like Chesterton said. That’s the rub isn’t it? Because real joy is bigger than you. It’s the death of self.

And so spoiled children don’t often experience it, but slaves do.

That’s why slaves and prisoners and poor people throw the best parties.

Remember the best party on the Titanic wasn’t on the top floor. It was down below.

That’s because strivings of the self is the death of joy. Self-centered, self-conscious people wreck a party. So I think people are afraid of joy. And yet they’re envious of joy. All the while Jesus offers them joy, but they don’t want it because they want it on their own terms. So people will begrudge your joy. And we begrudge each other’s joy.

People will try to hold your joy hostage to their sorrows. I do that all the time. I go to my small group. Someone's having a great time and I'm having a bad week. Suddenly I try to say this to them, *"Won't you feel sorry for me?"*

Wouldn't it be far more Godly if I said, *"Instead of you feeling sorry for me, I'd like to feel joy for you, rejoice with those who rejoice"?* Richard Wormbrand was in a Romanian prison in that Communist country that supposedly was creating the party. He had such joy in that prison, people would come to him and say, *"How do you do this?"*

And he said, *"This is how: I think of my brothers and sisters in America having pot roast and I rejoice for them."* That's so much like Jesus, isn't it? I have such a hard time doing it.

"Heaven will not forever be blackmailed by hell," C.S. Lewis said. There comes a time when people are left to the sorrows they've chosen, but for the children of God, rejoicing is a command. Rejoicing is sharing your joy; it's the death of self. A small group, then, is a place to weep with those who weep. I'm not saying you shouldn't do that, but in the end--that's only a means to the end—and that's joy.

A small group is a place to practice rejoicing with those who rejoice. It's a place to start practicing the party, sharing your joy, multiplying joy. Jesus said this: *"To him who has will more be given. The measure you give will be the measure you get."* You've got a little joy? *Give it away. Because God's just waiting to give you more.*

At Pentecost they shared with glad and generous hearts. That word *glad* in the Greek means ecstatic, overjoyed, and uncontrollable joy. So much so, they really believe this: *All things are mine. God has given me all things and so will I not just share all things with another.*

They gave all in joy and I think that's called love.

Why should you join a small group? Do you believe in this?
Then don't you want somebody to love?
Don't you need somebody to love?
Would you love somebody to love?
You better find somebody to love.

Because love has found you. *You better find somebody to love.*

On a quiet street in the city, a little old man walked along shuffling through the autumn afternoon. And the autumn leaves reminded him of other summers come and gone. He had a long lonely night ahead waiting for June. Then among the leaves near the orphans' home, a piece of paper caught his eye. He stooped to pick it up with trembling hands. As he read the childish writing, the old man began to cry because the words burned inside him like a brand. *"Whoever finds this, I love you. Whoever finds this, I need you. I ain't even got no one to talk to, so whoever finds this, I love you."*

The old man's eyes searched the orphans' home, and his eyes came to rest upon a child. Her nose pressed up against the windowpane. The old man knew he'd found a friend at last. He waved to her and smiled. And they both knew they'd spend the winter laughing at the rain.

And they did spend the winter laughing at the rain. Talking through the fence exchanging little gifts they'd made for each other. The old man would carve toys for the little girl. She would draw pictures for him of beautiful ladies surrounded by green trees and sunshine. And they laughed a lot.

Then on the first day of June the little girl ran to the fence to show the old man a picture she drew, but he wasn't there.

And somehow the little girl knew he wasn't coming back.

So she went to her room, took a crayon and paper and wrote: *"Whoever finds this I love you. Whoever finds this I need you. I ain't even got no one to talk to, so whoever finds this I love you."*

Sheer joy is God's. *And this demands companionship.*

Father, we thank you that you have invited us to come to this table. And that, Lord God, your joy, your nature, you are so full of joy that your joy demanded companionship. And, Lord God, I believe that you even saw what that companionship would cost before you even created the world—you knew what it would cost you.

But your joy demanded companionship. And out of your fullness you created us. And out of your fullness, you recreate us in grace, the fullness of yourself. You shower us with grace upon grace and you ask us: Would you come to my party? Would you come to my banquet? There are no more tears, and sorrow is put to death. Would you let your sorrow go? Would you lay it at his cross? Who is your sorrow about, yourself? Let yourself go.

Is your sorrow about another? Entrust them to Him. So, Lord God, I confess sometimes I hang on to my pains and my sorrows as a weapon against people and against you. Lord God, I repent. Not that you don't call me or us to weep with those who weep and bear the burdens of those who have burdens, but you call us to do it in joy.

And so, Lord Jesus, we accept your invitation. We come to your table. Lord, as you gave all, help us to give all. Will you help us to do it for the joy that is set before us? And we know it hurts, Lord God, but the joy is deeper than the sorrow. And you have invited us to your table, your banqueting table. We accept.

In Jesus name, Amen

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