

Circles **NOT** Rows!

Community is experienced *BEST* in Circles and *NOT* in Rows! (in a church context)

The Early Church Model of Community

The Jerusalem church grew rapidly from 120 in the upper room up to 10,000+ people in a matter of months.

Acts 21:20 (NIV) “When they heard this they praised God and said to Paul, You see brother how many thousands (GK ‘urias’) of Jews have believed and all of them are zealous for the law.”

Greek “*urias*” literally means “*tens of thousands*” Jews had believed in Jesus.

The church grew up to 100,000+ in a city of approximately 250,000.

This explains why the Sanhedrin accused Peter and John when they said, “*You filled all Jerusalem with your teaching,*” *Acts 5:28 (NIV)*.

The rapid growth of the early church raises at two questions:

1. Where did all the people meet?
2. How were they all cared for?

The early Church grew larger and smaller at the same time.

Acts 5:42 (NIV) “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.”

Two types of meetings.

1. They met in the ‘*Temple courts*’ - a large gathering.
2. From ‘*house to house*’ - small community groups in homes.

Acts 2:46 (NIV) “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.”

Acts 16:40 (NIV) “After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia’s house, where they met with the brothers and sisters and encouraged them. Then they left.”

Acts 20:20 (NIV) “You know that I have not hesitated to preach anything that would be helpful to you but have taught you publicly and from house to house.”

Romans 16:5 (NIV) “Greet also the church that meets at their house...” (See also *1 Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15*)

Building a Small Group Ministry Paradigm.

We were created for community and God desires for each one of us to experience the

benefits of authentic relationships in a true Biblical Community.

We gain a sense of belonging when we are a part of a small group of people who **DO** life together because life is better connected!

Following the pattern set in the early church, we come together in the larger gathering on Sundays whilst meeting midweek in a small group.

Rows are Good, but Circles are Better.

Face-to-face community (***circles*** – *small groups*) are more effective than shoulder-to-shoulder (***rows*** – *Sunday service*), when it comes to being connected together.

Life is better connected. The Christian life was always meant by God to be done together.

We need people in our lives that are there for us. We receive encouragement and support in a circled community.

Jesus' ministry reveals the power of community done in a circle. He preached to the masses, but in the ***circle*** is where Jesus built authentic community with his 12 disciples.

Circles provide the context for relationships.

People need to know and feel they belong!

A sense of belonging is best felt in a small group community where there is an attitude of acceptance, forgiveness and care shown towards one another.

This sense of belonging does not just *happen* - it has to be *intentional*.