



LEADERSHIP 2

Small Groups



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**THE
CHURCH
AND
SMALL
GROUPS**

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THE CHURCH AND SMALL GROUPS

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SOMEONE WHO CANNOT ERR



We are flawed and subject to making mistakes. That is why, sometimes, the harder we try to get things right, the worse things go, and then we feel frustrated and defeated. But God knows no failure, and He is willing to help us fulfill the mission He has entrusted to us. But for that to be a reality in our lives, we need to study what God's plan is for His children, and how He wants men and women to live and work. If we do this and put His advice into practice, we will certainly fulfill the mission with more effectiveness.

1. What did God say in Eden when He saw that Adam was alone? Genesis 2:18

Note: If God said that it was not good for man to be alone, it is because human beings are social entities. No one was created to live in isolation. The cruelty of modern society is that you live surrounded by crowds, but you are almost always alone. That is not God's plan for his children.

2. How does God want His children to live? Psalm 133:1; Galatians 6:2

Note: This experience of fellowship and harmony is difficult to achieve when there are many people. God desires us to be a worldwide family but made up of small and numerous families around the world. A single giant family would face many and varied difficulties that a single leader could not solve. In the

Israel's time, Moses learned this lesson in a painful way.

3. How did Moses feel about the many problems generated by the people? Deuteronomy 1:9-13

Note: "I alone cannot." It is impossible for one man to lead a great multitude. That is why God inspired his father-in-law Jethro to give Moses extraordinary advice.

4. What advice did Jethro give to his son-in-law Moses when he found him overwhelmed with work to lead the people of Israel? Exodus 18:17-23

Note: Here the concept of the small group is born. One person alone cannot lead God's flock. It is necessary to organize the believers in small groups so that the work of God advances and is completed.

5. What does the Servant of God state about small group work? Testimonies Treasures vol 3, 84 "The formation of small groups as the basis of Christian endeavor, *has been presented to me by one who cannot err.*"

Note: There are two main ideas in this quote. The first is that small groups are the foundation of any Christian endeavor. There can be no church initiative without the use of small groups. The second is that this way of working was presented by God, who cannot err.

6. According to the Servant of the Lord, what are the benefits of working in small groups? Christian Leadership Page 54 "When Moses had many burdens, the Lord brought forth a Jethro as counselor and helper. The counsel was accepted, and the burdens that weighed upon him were distributed among others, and a double objective was achieved: *Moses was relieved* and had a better chance for his life, *and the men learned to carry responsibilities*, qualifying themselves to work in positions of trust, so that Israel would not become accustomed to look to one man, and think that no one could do anything for them unless the matter was brought before that man."

7. How should we consider biblical counsel? The Publishing Ministry Page 324 "One sentence of Scripture is worth more than ten thousand human ideas or arguments."

Note: If this statement is true, we must be very careful to carry out the divine plan set forth in the Holy Scriptures. Human ideas and thoughts can never be above divine plans.

8. What other counsel does the Spirit of Prophecy give? Christian Service P. 92 "If there are.

many members in the church, *organize yourselves into small groups to work not only for the members of the church, but also for the unbelievers.* If in any place there are only two or three who know the truth, organize yourselves into a group of workers."

9. What question asked by Job should make us think about whether we despise Job's divine counsel? Job 9:4

Note: Resisting God is dangerous for two reasons. First, things do not go well for us when we do what we want without following God's advice. And second, we run the danger of hardening our hearts to the voice of God.

MY DECISION

EXAMPLE 2 OF JESUS

While Jesus developed his ministry on earth, he was emphatic in teaching his disciples that evangelization should be based in the homes of believers. He himself used the house of Peter and Andrew as the center of evangelization. When he sent his disciples to the mission field, he ordered them to go to the houses and from the houses to establish a network of other converted homes, until the whole city was evangelized. Jesus not only wanted to establish a church but a spiritual family, formed by many families.

1. How did Jesus begin his ministry? Mark 3:13 and 14

Note: Jesus began his ministry by choosing a small group of 12 disciples. He called them, trained them, and sent them out to develop the ministry using houses and homes as centers of Christian fellowship and evangelism.

2. What was the first house where Jesus began to gather people? Luke 4:38-40

Note: In Peter's house Jesus healed the mother-in-law. That same night people began to bring their guests to Peter's house to receive Jesus' blessings. This house became a center of fellowship, miracles, and teaching.

3. In whose house did Jesus begin an evangelistic work with tax collectors? Matthew 9: 9-11

Note: That was Matthew's house. He, as a tax collector, called other tax collectors who were his friends. Tax collectors in those times were hated by the people and considered unworthy of salvation. For that reason, the Pharisees were indignant.

4. Where did Jesus restore the sight of two blind men? Matthew 9: 28 and 29

Note: Were there synagogues and was there a temple in Christ's day? Of course, there were, but for some reason Jesus performed many of his miracles in houses. He went into the house of Zacchaeus, Jairus, Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. In short, He wanted to teach us the lesson that homes can be extraordinary centers of fellowship and evangelism.

5. Where was Jesus anointed, by a sinful woman? Matthew 26:6

Note: The house of Simon the leper was chosen as the place where Jesus would teach one of the greatest lessons about forgiveness and the transforming work he had come to do.

6. What else did Jesus do in the houses besides performing miracles? Mark 7: 17 and 18; 9:33-37; 10:10

Note: In addition to being places of miracles and fellowship, the houses were places of teaching. There the Master used questions and answers as a means of teaching and instruction.

7. What command did Jesus give his disciples, sending them out into the mission field? Luke 10:5-7

Note: Jesus' order was that his disciples should begin their work from a house. That home was to become a base for the gospel to spread in that city.

8. What should we, the followers of Jesus, do? 1 John 2:6

Note: It is inconsistent to say that we love Jesus if we disregard His advice and teachings. On many occasions Jesus said that if we love Him, we should do the things He did because He gave us the example. If the Master gave so much importance to ministry in the home, in small groups, shouldn't we do the same?

9. **How can we learn to do the work?** We will gain much instruction for our work *from a study of Christ's methods of work and His way of dealing with people*. In the Gospel account we have the record of how He worked for all classes of people and how He conducted Himself in the cities and villages where thousands were drawn to His side to hear His teaching. The master's words were clear and distinct and he spoke to them with sympathy and tenderness. They carried with them the assurance that they contained the truth. It was the simplicity and fervor with which Christ worked and spoke that drew so many to him."

MY DECISION

IN THE CHURCH PRIMITIVE

3

After the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, the nascent church began to meet in homes following the lesson the Master had taught them. Home-based ministry had become so common that throughout the book of Acts, most of the time the church is mentioned for fellowship or service it is associated with a house. The early Christians, filled with the power of the Spirit, they began to spread the message from house to house.

1. What four things did believers do daily in the early church? Acts 2:46 and 47

Note: The disciples, besides congregating in the temple, met in the houses, worshiped God, and offered help to the people. And while doing so, God added to the church those who were to be saved. He observes that meeting in small groups had become a way of life for them, because they did it daily.

2. How many were converted in those times? Acts 2:41 and 42; Acts 4:4

Note: Thousands were converted as a result of the lifestyle of these early Christians. Verse 42 emphasizes that the new converts "held fast to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and in prayers." The word "fellowship" involves the idea of small groups in which one helped the other. One could not speak of fellowship in a church of a thousand people.

3. What was the church doing in the home of Mary, the mother of John, when Peter

came after being released from prison? Acts 12:11 and 12

Note: The church had gathered in Mary's house to pray. Here we clearly see the concept of brethren meeting in homes. They could have met in the temple, but the Christian church met in the homes of families and that was the secret of its rapid growth.

4. What did Paul tell the elders about the way he carried out his ministry?

Acts 20:17,21

Note: Paul carried out his ministry in public and in the houses. The house churches played a very important role in the rapid growth and expansion of Christianity. It could be said, without a doubt, that the first three centuries were dominated by the work of the small groups that met in houses.

5. What was the name of the couple in whose house a small group met in Paul's time? Romans 16:3-5

Note: There was a small group in the house of Aquila and Priscilla. Paul is categorical in affirming that there was a small church that met in the house of this Christian couple.

6. Was there another church in Asia, besides the church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla? 1 Corinthians 16:19

Note: This verse implies that the small church that met in the house of Aquila and Priscilla was part of a larger church that was made up of other small groups or churches throughout the region of Asia.

7. What was in the house of Nymphas, who lived in Laodicea? Colossians 4:15

Note: It is not known for sure who Nymphas was. Of one thing, we are sure. A small group used to meet in her house, and thanks to this fact, the name of this character is recorded in the Bible.

8. What did Paul do after establishing the work in a place? The Acts of the Apostles, pp. 212, 213. "The apostle Paul felt that he was largely responsible for the spiritual welfare of those who were converted by his labors. He desired them to grow in the knowledge of the one true God and of Jesus Christ, whom he had sent. *Often in his ministry he would meet small groups of men and women who loved Jesus, and he would prostrate himself in prayer with them to ask God to teach them how to maintain a vital relationship with him.*"

9. What does the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews say about the way Christians should live? Hebrews 10:23-25

Note: Here we have an idea of what was done in the meetings of the early church that were held in homes. The Holy Spirit made each member an instrument of the church.

edification for the benefit of the body. You could not imagine this type of meeting in a solemn worship service with an enveloping liturgy. In the New Testament the expression "one another" is used more than fifty times. This is only possible in a small group.

10. What advice does the Servant of the Lord give today to the church and to pastors? Evangelical Workers Page 201 "My brethren in the ministry, do not think that the only work you can do, the only way you can work for souls, is to give speeches. The best work you can do is to teach, to educate. *Whenever you find occasion to do so, sit down with a family, and allow its ~~members~~ to ask you questions.* Then answer them with patience and humility. Carry on this work in connection with your more public endeavors. Preach less, and educate more, leading Bible studies and praying with families and small groups."

MY DECISION

FOR YOU TO DO WELL

4

We live in a world where we all want things to go well. No one starts a job thinking about failing. However, the ground of history is carpeted with frustrated lives. People who tried hard to make things work but did not achieve their goals. When we think about the mission of preaching the gospel to every nation, tribe, tongue, and people, we too must conclude that a long time has passed, and we have not concluded the mission. What is the reason? The purpose of this lesson is to make us understand where the problem lies.

1. To what two things did Jesus devote himself during the three years of his ministry? Acts 1:1

Note: The first 10 verses of Acts 1 describe the mission and teach us how to fulfill it. Verse 1 says that Jesus devoted himself to "doing and teaching". He never taught without first doing. He first "did," and then "taught." His teaching was born of practice. Jesus was not a teacher of theory alone.

2. Who is a true disciple of Jesus? John 8:31

Note: A true disciple is one who abides in the Word of Jesus, who obeys his instructions and follows his example.

3. Besides "doing" and "teaching", what else did Jesus do, through the Holy Spirit? Acts 1:2

Note: "He gave them commandments" says Luke. These commandments were related to the fulfillment of the mission. They were not suggestions or advice. They were commandments. Jesus would be unjust if he had given us the mission, without teaching us the way to fulfill the mission.

to fulfill it. The problem is that sometimes, we forget Jesus' teachings and try to fulfill the mission in our own way.

4. What is the result of obeying God? Jeremiah 42:6

Note: A group of officers from Judah came to Jeremiah seeking guidance on how to deal with the enemy. They did not know what to do and decided to ask for divine guidance. These officers knew that if they obeyed the divine command, they would do well. No one who follows the master's instructions goes wrong. This applies to the mission as well.

5. What does God consider more important than human sacrifice and effort? 1 Samuel 15:22

Note: Samuel said this to Saul, but it applies to anyone who believes that work, good intention, or human effort can be more important than obeying divine instructions.

6. How should he who says he abides in Christ do things? 1 John 2:6

Note: It is incoherent to say that we are disciples of Jesus if we do not do things as He taught us to do them. 1 Peter 2:21 says "And you were called for this. For Christ also suffered for us, wherewith he gave us an example, that we should follow his steps."

7. What does the Spirit of Prophecy say concerning the difficulty we have in following divine counsel? *We are slow to understand* how necessary it is to understand the teachings of Christ and His methods of work" (p. 377).

8. When is it necessary for us to understand and follow the methods of Christ? Evangelism Pg. 44 "If ever it was essential that we understand and follow the correct methods of teaching and imitate the example of Christ, it is *now*."

Note: The Servant of God wrote this in the 19th century. If at that time it was essential that Christ's method be understood, how much more so should it be today.

What is the counsel of the Spirit of Prophecy to the one who opposes this work? In every church there should be well-organized missionary groups to work in the neighborhood of that church. *Put self behind you and let Christ go before you as your life and power. Let this work penetrate without delay and the truth will be as leaven in the earth.* When such forces begin to work in all our churches, there will be a renewing, reforming, invigorating power, a reformation of energetic power in the churches, because the members will be doing the real work that God has given them to do."

MY DECISION

STRUCTURE AND PURPOSE | 5

Leaders were not established by God in the church to do everything, but to organize, train and enable each believer to do his or her part and to grow in their Christian experience, and of service. Small groups are an instrument for achieving these purposes, and leaders should never lose sight of them.

1. Why did God establish leaders in the church? Ephesians 6:12

Note: The purpose of leadership is to grow the believers in the Christian life and in the fulfillment of the mission. It is not God's plan that a few people do everything, but that everyone be involved in the life of the church. This ideal can only be achieved when the church is organized into small groups.

2. What is the ultimate goal of Christian growth? Ephesians 6:13

Note: Paul said that he did not pretend to have reached it. No one will reach God's ideal for his children on this earth. But in small groups, believers encourage one another to stay and continue this process of growth.

3. What is the ideal number of a small group? Exodus 18:25 and Mark 3:13 and 14.

Note: A group with 10 to 12 people can be considered small. Mutual companionship is easy to be developed. In larger groups cultivating friendship among the members becomes increasingly difficult. When the group grows, plans should be made to start another small group.

4. For what purpose did Jesus establish the first small group? Mark 3:13

Note: Here we see the purpose of establishing a small group. First, to be with Jesus, that is, fellowship and spiritual growth. Then, to preach, that is, evangelistic growth and fulfillment of the mission.

5. What other purpose is served by a small group? Testimonies for the Church Page 22 "If there are only two or three in a place who know the truth, let them join together to form a team of workers. *Let them keep their bond of union intact, closely knit together by love and unity*, encouraging one another to go forward, each gaining courage and strength from the support of his fellow workers."

Note: Perceive the three objectives of a small group: to maintain the bond of union, to be intimately united by love, to encourage each other to move forward.

6. What did the Servant of God have in mind about the purpose of "service companies," or "small groups"? Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 21. "Let companies be formed in our churches for service, and let different people *unite in the work of being fishers of men*. Let them strive to draw souls out of the corruption of the world and gather them around the saving purity of Christ's love."

7. How should the church work so that God will place his seal of approval? God is a God of order... Success can only accompany order and harmonious action... All who work for him must act intelligently, not carelessly or haphazardly. *He wants his work to be done with faith and accuracy*, so that he can put upon it the seal of his approval."

8. Is this way of living and fulfilling the mission productive? To all who work with Christ I want to say: ... The presentation of Christ in the family, in the home, or in small gatherings in private homes, *wins more souls for Jesus than sermons* preached in the open air, to agitated crowds, or even in halls or chapels".

Note: The Servant of God does not say that sermons are not necessary, but she affirms that working in small groups is more productive.

9. Discuss with the study group, where did the three thousand people who were baptized at Pentecost come from? When did they receive the body of doctrine? Who had prepared them? Could they have been all those people whom the disciples had visited in the homes of the families during Jesus' ministry?

MY DECISION

PRINCIPLE | 6 OR TRADITION?

One of the obstacles encountered in the establishment of small groups is the deep rootedness that men and women have with what "we have always done". There is an instinctive fear in human beings to change and move forward. Sincere brethren ask, "If we have always worked this way, why should we change now?" Some even believe that by establishing small groups we are burying the heritage of our fathers. In this study we will see how important that we have "always done" is.

1. What does the Spirit of Prophecy teach concerning devising plans to reach people with the message of salvation? Christian Service Page 92 "The church of Christ on earth was organized for missionary purposes, and *the Lord desires to see the whole church devising ways and means* by which the high and the lowly, the rich and the poor, may hear the message of truth."

2. Is the light we had in the past all the light there is? Proverbs 4:18

Note: The life of the Christian and of the church is a permanent discovery because life is growth. The foundation of our faith is Jesus Christ and his Word. The principles are eternal, but everything else can change from one generation to another, or from one culture to another. We must always be open to accept the light that comes into our lives. No one can claim to know everything,

and who does not need to learn.

3. Were there, in Jesus' time, people who did not want to change? What happened one day while he was in Jerusalem? Matthew 15: 1 and 2

Note: Here we see that the Pharisees were radically defending a custom. Washing hands before eating was not a principle. It could be a good custom, but not a principle. And yet there were people who created conflict by defending a custom.

4. Is it possible to place oneself against God's will because of tradition?

Matthew 15:4-6

Note: The Pharisees in the time of Christ were "sincere" people, but wrong. And Jesus told them that by defending a custom they were placing themselves against the will of God.

5. Did the people of Israel believe they served the Lord, but what was the sad reality? Isaiah 29:13

Note: The heart of that people was far from God, they believed that they obeyed and defended God, but they defended human teachings, customs that had passed from generation to generation, and that with time had been transformed into traditions. Traditions are dangerous because there comes a time when, for some, they become "commandments".

6. What is a tradition? Matthew 15:9

Note: Basically, tradition is based on uses and customs established by human beings in the past. Customs that the human group considers valuable and keeps them to be learned by the new generations, as an indispensable part of the ancestors' legacy.

7. Where do traditions come from? In the days of Christ, the established teachers instructed men in the traditions of the fathers, in puerile fables, with which were intermingled *the opinions of those who were regarded as high authorities*. Yet neither the high nor the lowly could find light or strength in their teachings."

8. Is there a biblical basis for small groups? Exodus 18:17-21; Mark 3:13 and 14

Note: It is unquestionable that the concept of working in small groups has a biblical foundation.

9. Do small groups have Spirit of Prophecy support? Christian Service. P. 72 " The formation of small groups as the basis of Christian endeavor *was shown to me by one who cannot err.*"

MY DECISION

ACTIVITIES

7

People who participate in the small group meet to sing, pray, study the Bible, and witness. Personal testimony has a lot of power. People who are learning the message are encouraged to hear that God is not just theory, but that He works in the lives of His children. In this study we will see what activities the Christians when they met in their homes.

1. Where was the upper room? Luke 22: 7.12

Note: The room where Jesus had the holy supper with his disciples was the room of a house, generally dedicated to prayer. The concept of the house should be emphasized here. After the death and resurrection of Christ the church did not build temples. It met in the synagogues of Jews who converted to Christianity, or in homes.

2. After Jesus' assumption, for what purpose did the group of disciples gather in the upper room? Acts 1:13 and 14

Note: The disciples needed divine guidance as to what they would do from then on. They were few, just a small group that gathered in the room of a house to pray.

3. What was the group gathered in Mary's house doing when Peter was rescued from prison by the angel? Acts 12:12

Note: The church prayed a lot, and usually met in the homes of their neighbors and friends to do so. The church was praying on behalf of Peter who was imprisoned when God answered them. That is why one of the main activities of the small group is to pray.

4. In apostolic days, what was done in the house meetings besides breaking bread? Acts 2: 46 and 47

Note: In addition to praying for each other, the people who met in the houses praised God. Singing was part of the activities that took place in the house meetings. Paul taught, "speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your hearts to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:19) And "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and exhorting one another in all wisdom, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs." (Colossians 3:16) On both occasions Paul refers to house meetings. One could not "admonish one another," or "speak to one another," in the temple, during worship.

5. Why were the Berean brethren considered noble? Acts 17: 10 and 11

Note: The Bereans were considered noble because they spent a lot of time studying the Bible, and naturally, they did so in the houses where they met. That is why another of the activities of the small group is to study the Bible.

6. Read the following quotation and answer: What 4 things does the Servant of the Lord recommend? Testimonies for the Church, vol. 7, p. 195. "*Let small companies meet together* in the evening, at noon, or early in the morning, to study the Bible. Let them have a time for prayer, that they may be strengthened, enlightened, and healed by the Holy Spirit...*Let each one tell his experience* in simple words. This will give more encouragement and joy to the soul than all the pleasant musical instruments that may be used in the churches. Christ will enter your hearts. This is the only means by which you can maintain your integrity."

- a. _____ b. _____
c. _____ d. _____

7. What did John talk about when he met with the brethren? 1 John 1: 1 & 2

Note: Personal witnessing has an extraordinary power. That is why in small groups each one tells what God has done in his or her life. This confirms the faith of the believers and helps those who are just learning the message.

8. What other activity should be done in the small group? Testimonies for the church. Why do not believers have a deeper, more earnest concern for those who are alienated from Christ? Why do not two or three meet together and plead with God for the salvation of one person, and then pray for another? *Let us form groups in our churches for service. Let several members join together to work as fishers of men.* Let them seek to snatch souls from the corruption of the world to the saving purity of the love of Christ".

9. Who to Gather in the Small Group? The Ministry of Kindness p. 198 "Every member of the church should consider that he has a special duty to work for *those who live in his neighborhood*. Study how best to help those who have no interest in religious things. As you visit *your friends and neighbors*, manifest an interest in their spiritual as well as their temporal welfare. Present Christ as the Savior who forgives sin. *Invite your neighbors to your home and* read with them the precious Bible and the books that explain its truths. This, coupled with simple hymns and fervent prayers, will stir their hearts."

MY DECISION

BENEFITS.

8

Churches that have organized themselves into small groups throughout the world can testify to the blessings that have come upon them as a result of this work. After all, small group churches meeting in homes is not a human plan but was presented by "one who cannot err. In this last study we will see some positive results that will happen in your church if you put this plan into action.

1. What has God promised his church for the last days? Joel 2: 25 and 28

Note: It is necessary to realize that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit will happen after His church "has eaten". Naturally this refers to being fed by the Word of God. Small groups help the church to encourage Bible study, preparing it for the latter rain of the Spirit.

2. What was God doing for his church as she lived a Christian fellowship experience in the homes? Acts 2:46 and 47

Note: The expression "God added to them those who were going to be saved" is eloquent. Here is the answer to the missionary unproductivity of some churches.

3. What will happen in churches that are organized in small groups? The Ministry of Kindness, p. 112 "In every church there should be well-organized missionary groups to work in the neighborhood of that church.... Let this work penetrate without delay.... When such forces begin to work in all our churches, *there will be a renewing, reforming, invigorating power, a reformation of energetic power in the churches,* because the members will be doing the real work that God has given them to do."

4 How did the disciples work in the first century Christian church? The Desire of Ages Page 757 "*the disciples went from group to group, telling everything they had seen and heard from Jesus, and reasoning from the Scriptures as he had done with them*" (1 Corinthians 5:1).

5. What other benefit will the church receive as a result of small groups? Jewels of the Testimonies. Th. If there are many members in the church, organize yourselves into small groups to work not only for the members of the church, but for the unbelievers. If in any place there are only two or three who know the truth, organize yourselves into a group of workers. *Keep your bond of union intact, closing your ranks for the sake of love and unity, encouraging one another to make progress, and gaining courage, strength,* and help from *one* another.

6. How should we help young people? Christian Service. P. 44. "Young men and young women, *can you not form groups* and, as soldiers of Christ, enlist in the work, putting all your tact and ability and talent in the master's service, that you may save souls from ruin? *Let groups be organized in all the churches to do this work...* Will the young men and ladies who really love Jesus be organized as workers, not only to labor on behalf of those who profess to be Sabbath keepers, but also those who are not of our faith?"

7. Why was Christ's mission not understood by the people of His time? Words of Life of the Great Teacher Page 17 "The mission of Christ was not understood by the people of His time... His purpose was to teach the people that at the appointed time the One to whom these ceremonies pointed would come. But *the Jews had exalted the forms and ceremonies and had lost sight of their object.* The traditions, maxims, and statutes of men hid from their view the lessons which God intended to convey to them. Those maxims and traditions became an obstacle to the understanding and practice of true religion."

8. Discuss in the study group: Is it possible that, by defending our traditions, we misunderstand Jesus' plan for his church today?

MY DECISION
