

When the Church was a Family

Recapturing Jesus' Vision for Authentic Christian Community

Joe Hellerman, Ph.D. — EFCA — April 15-16, 2013

Session #1: *Christian Community In Historical Context*: The Value of Cultural Analysis for Biblical Interpretation

1. Interpreting the Bible in a Postmodern World: Many Interpretations — One Intended Meaning

Jesus & The Rich Young Ruler — Interpretation #1

[Upper-Middle Class Anglican South Africans]

The man's problem lies in his personal relationship with God. His sin consists in putting wealth/possessions before following Jesus. Jesus' challenge to the wealthy man is to make sure that wealth is not an idol, that possessions do not come between him and God. Such interpretations are often read through:

- **A PAULINE LENS:** “The rich man was thinking in terms of Jewish works of righteousness. He wanted to **do** something to merit eternal life, whereas Jesus taught that eternal life (the kingdom of God) is a gift to be received (cf. v. 15).” [W. Wessel]
- **AN INDIVIDUALISTIC LENS:** “The demand which Jesus made on this bewildered man was suited to his particular circumstances and state of mind. The Lord does not ask every rich person—for example Abraham (Gen. 13:2), or Joseph of Arimathea (Matthew 27:57)—to do exactly the same thing.” [W. Hendriksen]

Jesus & The Rich Young Ruler — Interpretation #2

[Post-Apartheid Poor Black South Africans]

Jesus is not only challenging the man's individual sin. He is attacking structural (institutional) sin, as well. The man likely acquired his wealth by exploiting other people. In the commandment to sell all and give to the poor, Jesus is therefore challenging the man to repent of—and make restitution for—his social and structural sin. Such a command would have application not just to the rich young ruler but to all wealthy first-century Jews who wanted to follow Jesus.

- There were probably social structures (like apartheid) which produced wealth for the man and poverty for the people. So even if the man had worked hard for his property or inherited his wealth, he was still part of a sinful social structure.
- Therefore, the man's sin lies primarily in the way he related to his fellow human beings.

GO FIGURE:

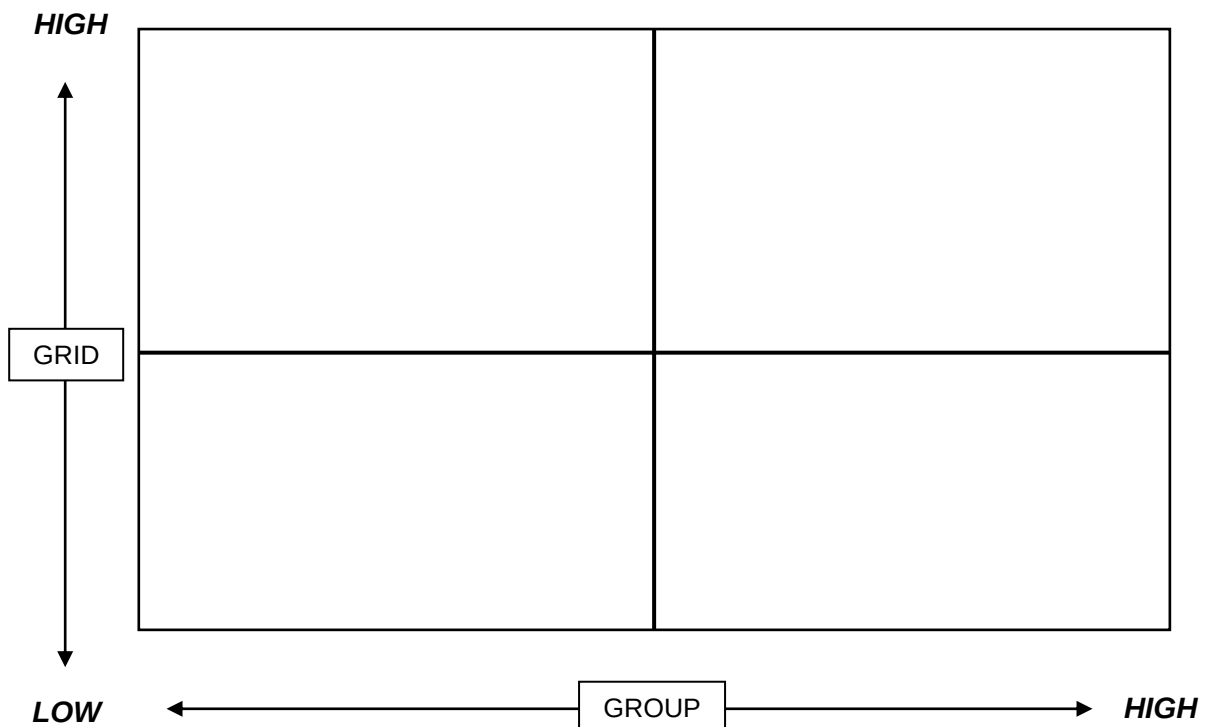
Which interpretation have you been taught?

Which interpretation is the correct one?

What criteria do we use to decide between competing interpretations of biblical texts?

ANSWER: The correct interpretation is the one that makes the most sense of the Bible in its own _____, _____, and _____ context.¹

2. Ancient Mediterranean “Cultural Basics”: A World Of Difference



¹ For Hellerman's take, see "Wealth and Sacrifice in Early Christianity: Revisiting Mark's Presentation of Jesus' Encounter with the Rich Young Ruler." *Trinity Journal*, 21.2 [Fall 2000].

3. Individualism Versus Collectivism: *The Group Comes First*

- a. Weak-Group Thinking — **My Dreams, My Desires, My Goals**
- b. Strong-Group Thinking — **Our Dreams, Our Desires, Our Goals**

*[In a strong-group society] the person perceives himself or herself to be a member of a group and responsible to the group for his or her actions, destiny, career, development, and life in general. Correspondingly he/she perceives other persons primarily in terms of the groups to which they belong. The individual person is embedded in the group and is free to do what he or she feels right and necessary only if in accord with group norms and only if the action is in the group's best interest. The group has priority over the individual member, and it may use objects in the environment, other groups of people in the society, and the members of the group itself to facilitate group oriented goals and objectives (B. J. Malina, *Christian Origins and Cultural Anthropology*, 19).²*

- **KEY IDEA:** In the social world of the early Christians the survival and health of the _____ took priority over the needs and desires of the _____.

AMONG THE JEWS

*At these [Temple] sacrifices prayers for the welfare of the community must take precedence over those for ourselves; for we are born for fellowship, and he who sets its claims above his private interests is specially acceptable to God (Josephus, *Contra Apion* 2.197).*

AMONG THE CHRISTIANS

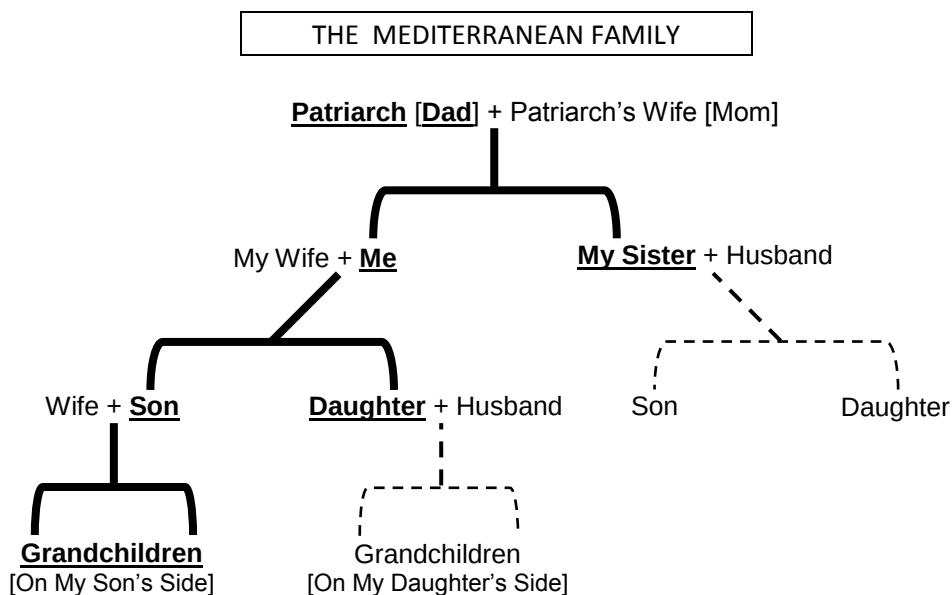
Before all things, the Teacher of peace and Master of unity did not wish prayer to be offered individually and privately as one would pray only for himself when he prays. We do not say: "My Father, who art in heaven," nor "Give me this day my bread," nor does each one ask that only his debt be forgiven him and that he be led not into temptation and that he be delivered from evil for himself alone. Our prayer is public and common, and when we pray we pray not for one but for the whole people, because we, the whole people, are one (Cyprian of Carthage, 250 A.D.).

4. Focus on the Family: *The Strongest "Strong Group" Of All*

- **KEY IDEA:** _____ was the group to which persons in Mediterranean antiquity expressed _____ relational allegiance.

² Non-biblical sources (ancient writers and modern scholars) are in *italics*. Scripture is cited in a non-italic font (NIV unless noted otherwise).

a. Ancient Family Structure



1. The _____ determines family membership.
2. _____ can pass on family membership (patriline).
3. _____ cannot pass on family membership.
4. Spouses belong to _____ families (not consanguine).
5. Siblings belong to the _____ family (consanguine).

b. Ancient Family Relations

1. Marriage is _____ not _____.

*Marriage is a legal and social contract between two families for (1) the promotion of the status of each, (2) the production of legitimate offspring, and (3) the appropriate preservation and transfer of property to the next generation (C. Osiek and D. Balch. *Families in the New Testament World: Households and House Churches*, 42).*

2. **KEY IDEA:** The closest same generational family bond in the New Testament world was not the bond of _____ — it was the bond between _____.

My soul takes pleasure in three things and they are beautiful in the sight of the Lord and of men: agreement between siblings, friendship between neighbors, and a wife and husband who live in harmony (Sirach 25:1).

“If I do not love my brother, who shall I love?” (Jubilees 35:22).

3. Correspondingly, the most treacherous act of human disloyalty in an ancient family was not disloyalty to one’s _____ — it was the betrayal of a _____ .

Matthew 10:21 — “Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child; children will rebel against their parents and have them put to death.”

“Among yourselves, my sons, be loving of your brothers as a man loves himself, with each man seeking for his brother what is good for him....and each one will love his brother with compassion and righteousness and no one will desire evil for his brother from now and forever all the days of your lives so that you will prosper in all your deeds and not be destroyed. And if either of you seeks evil against his brother, know that hereafter each one who seeks evil against his brother will fall into his (God’s) hands and be uprooted from the land of the living and his seed will be destroyed from under heaven. And on the day of turmoil and execration and indignation and wrath, (then) with devouring burning fire just as he burned Sodom so too he will burn up his land and his city and everything which will be his....and he will not be written on high in the Book of Life....I am exhorting you, my sons, according to the judgment which will come upon the man who desires to harm his brother” (Jubilees 36:4-11).

c. Evaluating an Institution VERSUS Appreciating a Metaphor

1. The above description of the patrilineal family does not tell what family _____ (≠ PRESCRIPTIVE). It tells us what family ACTUALLY WAS (= DESCRIPTIVE). The sibling metaphor (“brother/sister”), as used in the New Testament, was taken from what family _____ .
2. Our study does not address the question “What should _____ be like?” It addresses the question “What should _____ be like?”

Session #2: *Who Are My Mother And My Brothers?:* Jesus, His Family, and the Family of God

1. Surrogate Family in the Gospels: Loyalty To God's New Group

A. Three Kinds Of Family Sayings In The Gospels

1. A _____ Kind

Matthew 15:3-4 — “And why do you break the command of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, ‘Honor your father and mother’ and ‘Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.’”

2. A _____ – _____ – _____ Kind

Matthew 8:21-22 — Another disciple said to him, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” But Jesus told him, “Follow me, and let the dead bury their own dead.”

3. A _____ _____ Kind

Matthew 12:48-50 — He replied to him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” Pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”

B. Putting ‘Em All Together

1. **OPTION #1:** _____ Jesus

- _____ the “happy” teachings
- _____ the “not-so-happy” teachings
- _____ passages the don’t fit the paradigm

2. **OPTION #2:** Be _____ By Jesus

- Appreciate the _____ nature of Jesus’ encounters with individuals
- Take the “not-so-happy” teachings at _____

- Embrace the _____ - _____ nature of Jesus' call to discipleship
- Prioritize the “_____” teachings

C. Getting Our Priorities Straight

1. Traditional Evangelical Relational Priorities:

(1) _____ (2) _____ (3) _____ (4) _____

2. Jesus' Radical Alternative:

(1) _____ & _____ (2) _____ (3) _____

2. Qualifications — Observations — Questions

A. Key Qualifications

1. The church is a _____ — not a _____. It is an _____ — not an _____.
2. The commitment to which Jesus calls us is a _____ commitment — not an _____ commitment.
3. Jesus' radical alternative is not to be used as an excuse to sacrifice my _____ on the altar of Christian _____.
4. Believers in my _____ family remain my _____ relational priority among the people of God.

B. Crucial Observations

1. The family of God is not here to _____ my family. My family is here to _____ the family of God.

2. A family that is deeply _____ in the broader family of God will be _____ and more _____ for the Kingdom of God than a family that is not.

C. Piercing Questions

1. Am we socializing our children to become productive _____ ?
2. Or am we challenging our children to become _____ ?
3. “Who are _____ mother and my brothers?”

“Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.”
— Jesus of Nazareth —

Session #3: *The Church As A Family In The New Testament:* Implications for Theology & Practice

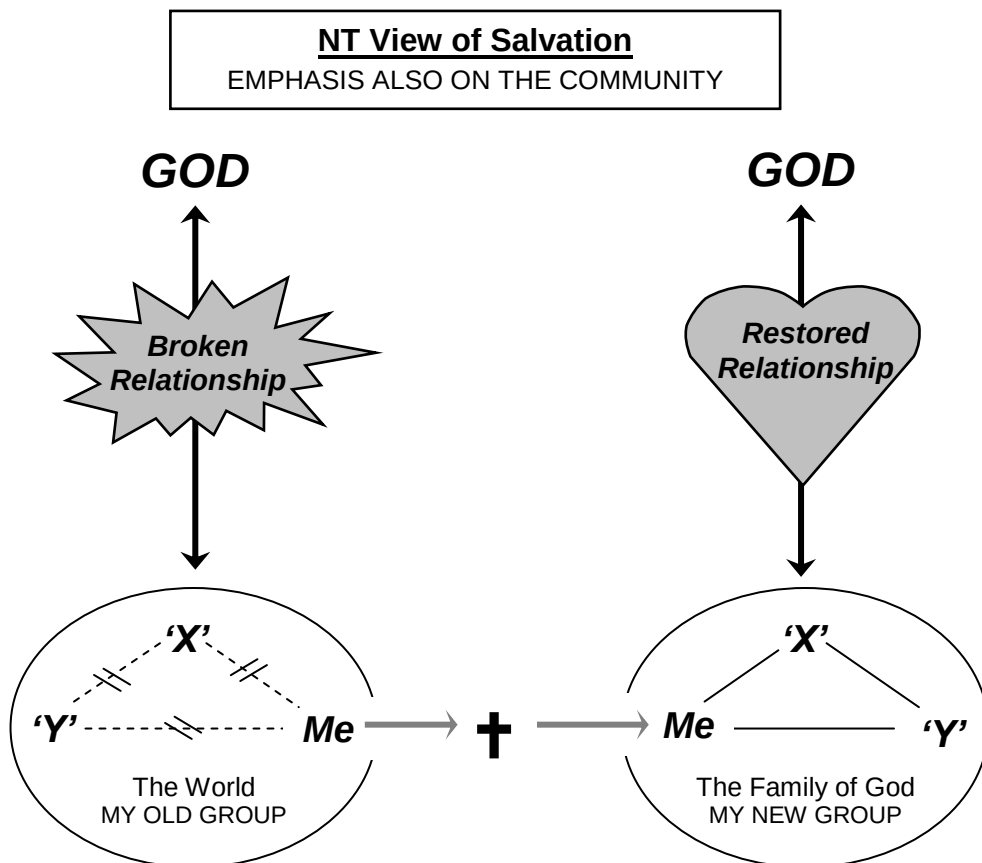
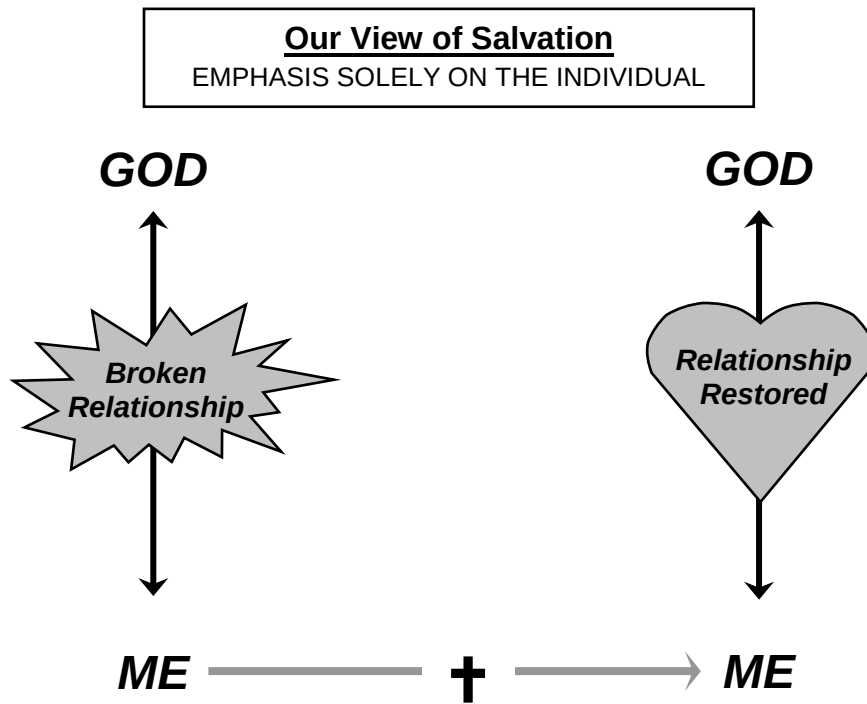
1. Implications For Soteriology: *Salvation as a Community-Creating Event*

A. Salvation To Community: Justification AND _____

Acts 2:37-41 — 37 When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” 38 Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. 39 The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off—for all whom the Lord our God will call.” 40 With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, **“Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”** 41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and **about three thousand were added to their number that day.**

Acts 2:42-47 — 42 They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. 43 Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. 44 All the believers were together and had everything in common. 45 Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. 46 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, 47 praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

1 Corinthians 12:13 — We were all baptized by one Spirit into one body.



B. Salvation To Community: Restoring a _____ Gospel

1. Compare & Contrast

POPULAR EVANGELICALISM

ASKS:

RESULT:

NEW TESTAMENT CHRISTIANITY

ASKS:

RESULT:

Mark 8:34-35 — Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”

2. The 2>1>3 of Spiritual Formation in a Relationally Starved Culture

2. Implications For Ecclesiology: *It's Not About Sunday, Brothers & Sisters*

A. We Share Our _____ with One Another

1 John 3:14-17 — We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love our **brothers**. Anyone who does not love remains in death....If anyone has material possessions and sees his **brother** in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?

B. We Share Our _____ with One Another

Philippians 4:1 — Therefore, my **brothers and sisters**, whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, my beloved (NRSV).

C. We Do Not _____ at One Another

1 Corinthians 6:5-8 — 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between **believers** (adelphos)? 6 But instead, one **brother** (adelphos) goes to law against **another** (adelphos) — and this in front of unbelievers! 7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your **brothers** (adelphos).

D. We _____ , Embrace the _____ , and _____ Up with One Another

Matthew 18:15-22 — “If your **brother** sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your **brother** over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ 17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. 18 “I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 “Again, I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything you ask for, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.” 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my **brother** when he sins against me? Up to seven times?” 22 Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.”

Session #4: *Embracing Shared Leadership*: It Starts At The Top, Brothers³

1. The Biblical Data: An Impressive Collection of Witnesses

Gentile Churches:

Acts 14:23 — Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord, in whom they had put their trust.

Acts 20:17 — From Miletus, Paul sent to Ephesus for the elders of the church.

Philippians 1:1 — Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus at Philippi, together with the overseers and deacons.

Titus 1:5 — The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint elders in every town, as I directed you.

1 Peter 5:1-4 — 1 To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: 2 Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers — not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; 3 not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. 4 And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away.

Jewish Churches:

Hebrews 13:17 — Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you.

James 5:14 — Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord.

A Gospel Trajectory?

Matthew 23:8-12 — 8 "But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers. 9 And do not call anyone on earth '**father**,' for you have one Father, and he is in heaven. 10 Nor are you to be called 'teacher,' for you have one Teacher, the Christ. 11 The greatest among you will be your servant. 12 For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted."

Mark 10:28-30 — 28 Peter said to him, "We have left everything to follow you!" 29 "I tell you the truth," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel 30 will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age (homes, **brothers, sisters, mothers, children** and fields — and with them, persecutions) and in the age to come, eternal life."

³ See Joseph H. Hellerman, *Embracing Shared Leadership: Power & Status in the Early Church and Why It Matters Today* (Forthcoming, Kregel 2013).

2. Pragmatics: Can This Really Work?

A. Benefits of Team Ministry For Leaders

- ✧ Provides God's leaders with _____ and _____ accountability.
- ✧ Moderates the personal impact of both the _____ and _____ of ministry.
- ✧ Gives church pastors the _____ to encourage their people to share their lives with one another.

B. Benefits of Team Ministry For Church Members

- ✧ Provides God's people with a visible reminder that _____ is the head of the church.
- ✧ Provides God's people with a balanced perspective in the area of _____.
- ✧ Provides God's people with a balanced perspective in the area of _____ - _____.
- ✧ Models _____ at the highest level of church leadership.
- ✧ Moderates the impact upon the church of the _____ of a key leader.

C. The Decision-Making Process: Does Plurality Really Work?



"God's church is to be led by a plurality of pastor-elders who relate to one another first as brothers in Christ, and who function only secondarily—and only within that

primary relational context—as vision-casting, decision-making leaders for the broader church family.” (Hellerman—Embracing Shared Leadership).