

## CA 35 TFP3 FROM ISOLATION TO RELATIONSHIP

### Music theme

**FOSTER:** It was an amazing experience. First Church had grown to thousands of members in a very short time. Jim, Pete, and John hadn't planned to have a large church. They didn't plan to have a church at all, but one day, Pete was moved by the Holy Spirit to share a message of sin and salvation on a public street. Immediately people confessed their sins and were excited about following Jesus Christ.

After this happened, *those* people started sharing Christ and inviting *their* friends and family members to First Church. Then *those* people did the same thing! It was an exciting work of God. But Jim, Pete, and John soon learned that heading a church of thousands made it difficult to meet individual needs. But what could they do?

Welcome to Champions Arise. I'm Foster Braun and I'm with Kent Darcie. First Church was confronted with the challenge of meeting the needs of the individuals in the church. Those people, like you and me, needed to be connected to each other so they could grow in their Christian life. We'll look at God's solution to this problem, and how we can benefit from what they learned today on Champions Arise.

### *Music Theme in*

**FOSTER:** Kent, having a church grow from a couple dozen to several thousand people that quickly must have been challenging for Pete, Jim, and John.

**KENT:** It was, but with God's Holy Spirit guiding them, the church continued to grow.

**FOSTER:** In fact, today First Church has millions of members around the world.

**KENT:** Yes it does, because First Church is the actual first church. Pete, Jim, and John are the apostles Peter, James, and John.

We read in the book of Acts that shortly after Jesus ascended into heaven, Peter preached his first sermon. 3000 people turned their lives over to Jesus Christ that day and soon over 5000 people were following Christ under the leadership of the Apostles.

But those individuals needed to grow deeper in their walk and that was done by meeting in the temple (or church) and together in smaller groups.

*Acts 2:46 and 47 says, "And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people."*

**FOSTER:** So we see in the book of Acts that the followers of Christ met regularly in homes. Why was that important?

**KENT:** It provided protection and information. Being a Christ-follower had a high cost during this time. Your family might disown you. Your customers might not purchase items from your shop anymore. The book of Acts also tells us that the authorities were arresting Christians. So in a house group (what we would call a small group today) there was an element of safety and you could get the latest news on any persecution.

**FOSTER:** And the house groups also provided provision.

**KENT:** Yes. If you lost your business, or family members cut you off, the group could help with your needs. But most important, it provided a place of learning and encouragement.

**FOSTER:** Why was this necessary?

**KENT:** There was a lot of persecution going on during this time. Pressure to walk away from Jesus Christ came from family, friends, and society in general.

**FOSTER:** And that is still happening around the world today.

**KENT:** True. In fact a parable Jesus told about a sower who planted seed and what happened to the seed speaks to this problem. Matthew 13: verses 19-23 read,

*“The seed that fell on the footpath represents those who hear the message about the Kingdom and don’t understand it. Then the evil one comes and snatches away the seed that was planted in their hearts. The seed on the rocky soil represents those who hear the message and immediately receive it with joy. But since they don’t have deep roots, they don’t last long. They fall away as soon as they have problems or are persecuted for believing God’s word. The seed that fell among the thorns represents those who hear God’s word, but all too quickly the message is crowded out by the worries of this life and the lure of wealth, so no fruit is produced. The seed that fell on good soil represents those who truly hear and understand God’s word and produce a harvest of thirty, sixty, or even a hundred times as much as had been planted!”*

We see four groups of men here:

- Those who hear the word and don’t understand it, so they go away from Christ.
- Those who receive God’s truth, but don’t have deep roots so they drift away from Christ
- Those who receive God’s truth, but the pressures and temptations of the world cause them to be Christian in name, but not with their behavior.
- And those who received God’s truth and bore fruit for God’s kingdom.

**FOSTER:** But the goal for all of these men is to be in the fourth group who heard, understood, and followed God’s word.

**KENT:** Yes. But it’s very difficult—I would say almost impossible—to do without being in a small group. Either a men’s group –which I highly recommend—or a mixed group

which is also good. But mens groups are important, because I find that men are more willing to be real when there are no women there.

**FOSTER:** And you're not saying anything against women.

**KENT:** Oh, absolutely not. I'm simply saying that guys who have issues and problems, tend to feel more comfortable sharing them with a group of men.

- It might be you've reached mid-life. You're married, have three kids, an okay job, and you're wondering "is this it?"
- Perhaps your son or daughter has left the faith and secretly, you're devastated by that.
- Or you're stressed with all of the responsibilities you have.
- Maybe the physical intimacy part of your marriage is flat. Your wife is busy with the kids and volunteering at the school or church and you're finding yourself tempted by a new female employee at work who has been talking with you.

It could be anything, but men need a safe, biblical place to share their concerns and worries, *and temptations*.

**FOSTER:** And if you joined us late, you're listening to Champions Arise. I'm Foster Braun and I'm with Kent Darcie. Today we're talking about the importance for men to be connected to a small group. But Kent, is it safe to say that men would rather handle their stress and problems on their own?

**KENT:** Generally speaking yes. And though we seem to be naturally inclined to be that way, we have to remember that we are in a spiritual war. Satan wants to defeat us. The Apostle Peter warns in 1 Peter 5 verse 8, "*Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.*"

**FOSTER:** And Satan does his best work when we are separated and by ourselves.

**KENT:** Yes he does. And the roaring lion image is perfect because a group of lions will hunt as a team. They creep up on a herd of antelope from downwind so they can't be heard or smelled. Then the male moves to one side while the females move to the other. They follow the herd awhile looking for the young, old, weak, and sickly. This is because when the lions attack, these are the ones that end up alone and vulnerable.

Satan uses the same approach on us. For example, take that new female employee who has been talking to you. There is going to come a point where you hear a warning in your head. That's the Holy Spirt saying "Danger! A married man shouldn't be having these thoughts about another woman."

➤ **FOSTER:** And this is where Satan comes in.

**KENT:** That's right.

**FOSTER:** I've seen this over and over. He tells the man two things: first, there's nothing to worry about because your feelings are ok.

**KENT:** which is a lie.

**FOSTER:** And second, you don't need to tell anyone how you are feeling.

**KENT:** Which is a deadly lie. Satan wants to isolate us from godly people that can help us, not only to avoid temptation and fall into sin, but people who can help us to grow in the Lord.

Foster, let's continue with this female employee situation. And look at how going from isolation to connection in a small group can help.

You're starting to enjoy seeing that woman at work. She smiles, smells nice, and is always interested in your opinion. Soon, you're thinking about her throughout the day. Then it happens. She asks you if you could discuss a work problem with her over lunch the next day. You say yes. And you're really looking forward to it.

But the next morning, your men's group meets. You go, but you're quieter than usual, hoping nobody asks you anything about your lunch meeting. But that's not the kind of men's group you're in.

"Hi Bob," your friend Josh says. "How are you doing?"

"I'm doing fine". You say as confidently as you can.

But you've been attending this men's group for a year and Josh senses something isn't right. So he asks. "Bob are you doing ok?"

"Sure" you respond.

Then he asks "the question"

**FOSTER:** The question?

**KENT:** Yes. This is the question everyone in the men's group agrees to ask and more importantly agrees to answer truthfully.

"Bob, are you hiding anything?"

You hesitate and avoid his glance which tells Josh all he needs to know. He takes you into a corner and says, "Bob, what's up?"

You tell him about the woman at your job, how your wife has been ignoring you, and how you're feeling.

Josh listens, doesn't judge, or even give scriptures why you're wrong. He just smiles, looks you in the eye and says,

"Bob, my Christ-following friend, what are you going to do?"

A tear comes to your eye as you think how close you came to taking a step that could have led to a life-changing mistake.

You thank Josh and then the two of you pray for strength to be faithful to God and your wives.

Foster, this is why men need small groups. Isolation doesn't work.

**FOSTER:** Kent, I'm thinking of men who didn't have that small group for support and how disastrous the consequences were.

**KENT:** It's very sad. King Solomon wrote in Ecclesiastes 4 vs 9-12, *"Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken"*

**FOSTER:** So Kent, what does a small group look like? And does it have to be just men?

**KENT:** No it doesn't have to be just men. Small groups that include you and your wife are very helpful, but in addition to that, I strongly recommend being part of a group of men who want to serve Christ with all their hearts.

To your question what does it look like, a small group connects people to each other, and to the church body as a whole.

Also, a healthy small group must have confidentiality and a Bible-based focus on Christ.

**FOSTER:** You can discuss a variety of issues, but it's with Biblical truth as the foundation and standard.

**KENT:** That's right. To be effective, a small group provides an atmosphere of trust that enables vulnerability to share concerns, hopes, and troubles, **and** provides accountability, encouragement, training, and support. A small group that meets weekly or bi-weekly is best.

**FOSTER:** What if you don't have a small group available?

**KENT:** If you don't have a small group at your place of worship,

- Pray for a few Christian friends to join you.
- Ask them to meet with you, or you and your wife, for a set time-period like eight or twelve weeks.
- To start, read a scripture like the Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6. Share what it means and how it can apply to your lives.
- Then finish with prayer. And allow time to pray for the needs of those in the group.

Soon you'll see God working in great ways in your life!

**FOSTER:** Thanks Kent. My friend, God didn't intend for men to follow Christ by themselves. I hope you'll take the important step of finding and participating in a small group.

***Music Theme in***

**Program Close**

**FOSTER:** Thank you for listening to Champions Arise where men are equipped and strengthened to meet their God-given potential. Today we discussed the importance of being a part of a small group. This material was based on chapter 20 in the book "The Four Priorities," by Dr. John Tolson and Larry Kreider which is published by "The Gathering USA" in 2007 and used with permission. You can learn more about this book and listen to any of these programs at our website [championsarise.org](http://championsarise.org). I'm Foster Braun with Kent Darcie. Thank you for listening to Champions Arise. May God mold you into the man He knows you can be.

***Music under then up established and out***

**Closing ID**

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