

## August 12, 2012 - If Jesus Was on Facebook

The title for our lesson this morning is “If Jesus Was on Facebook”. I came up with this photo and some of you may think that’s a photo-shopped picture but no, I actually went on Facebook last night and typed in a search word for “Jesus” and this is the page I came up with. Apparently there is someone out there who created a Facebook page for Jesus. Now, this is not an official endorsement of this page. I’m just saying that it’s out there. As I looked through what is actually out there on Facebook, it just kind of struck me that the number of people who are using social media these days for all sorts of things, is an incredible high number. Now, Facebook itself, is for those of you who are lucky enough NOT to be involved with Facebook yet, Facebook is a website where you can go on and you can share all sorts of comments and pictures and all sorts of things. All the people who are signed up as your friends can see all of this stuff that you throw out there. It’s called a Social Networking Service. It was created by a guy named Mark Zuckerberg, who is a college student and it was officially launched in February of 2004 which is just 8 years ago. Actually we should probably knock a few years off of that because at first it was only for the students at Harvard and it took a couple of years before it was actually a public thing. So in 8 years or less, Facebook has grown to the point where, as of May of this year, there are 900 million users on Facebook. That is a lot of people using Facebook every day.

Now, maybe you’re not a Facebook person, maybe you’re a Twitter person. Twitter is a different kind of social networking service where people get to share their views on the World, 140 characters at a time. So you can go on there and you can say something as long as it’s only 140 characters long and everyone who is your ‘follower’ on Twitter, can see all of these things you share. It was created by a guy named Jack Dorsey back in July, 2006. So this is only 6 years old and in 6 years, Twitter has gained for itself 500 million registered users. On Twitter, every day, there are 340 million Tweets that go out. So 340 million times someone is sharing their thoughts on something on Twitter.

Now, one of the new ones that has come out is called Instagram. What Instagram is, is you can go take a picture on your Smart Phone and upload it to Instagram and everyone else on Instagram can see this picture you have taken. Now, Instagram is relatively new. It started less than two years ago and already it has 80 million people who are using Instagram.

As I looked at all of these and as I looked at all of the things that people are doing all of the social media that people are involved in, it got me to wondering and got me to thinking. As I consider the technology that is out there I realize, you know, the technology is morally neutral. Technology is not good and it’s not bad it’s what you do with the technology that makes it either good or bad. So when we look at these things like Facebook and Twitter and so on, on the one hand if you use them one way they can be a valuable tool, if you use them a different way, they can be a colossal waste of time. Now, I won’t ask you which one of those is true for you in your social media life. But that is kind of how it goes depending on what you’re doing. The plus side of the whole social media networking craze is that, there is a

sense about it that helps us to feel more connected. I'm on Facebook and on Facebook I can connect with a lot of my friends from my past from high school and from college and my friends who are still in Vancouver and I can kind of keep tabs on them and I know what they're doing; when they have babies; when they go on holidays and I kind of glean some of this information. Occasionally we have a conversation between each other. It kind of gives you a sense of being connected over time. There's lots of people that I feel connected with now through my social media that I know, if it weren't for that, I wouldn't have a clue where they were or what they looked like or any of that just because I don't have that contact.

Now, the down side of all of this is, that it makes you feel connected without actually being connected. I was thinking on Twitter you can follow, one of the biggest people to follow in the last weeks on Twitter is Michael Phelps. He was at the Olympics and he was swimming and he's the guy who now has 22 Olympic Medals, 18 gold, so he is the most popular guy to follow. You can follow him on Twitter and hear about what he is doing, what he is thinking, what he had for supper and all of that kind of valuable information. And I thought, you know, I could follow Michael Phelps, I'm just one click away from being one of his followers on Twitter and I could hear all of this stuff that he was having to say and I could learn all of this stuff about Michael Phelps. If let's just say when the Olympics are over this weekend and Michael Phelps is flying back home to the United States and for some reason there is some problem with the aircraft and so for whatever reason they divert to Saskatoon for an emergency landing. They land the plane here in Saskatoon and everyone is getting off the plane and Michael Phelps is getting off the plane and so I'm here working at my office and I hear on the radio that this is going on. I say "Oh! Michael Phelps is coming I'm just going to run 5 minutes out to the airport and see him. So Michael Phelps comes off the airplane and he comes through those doors at security where you come into the lounge of the airport and he comes through that door and I walk up to him and say "Hey Michael! How are ya? Mike Parker here, I'm one of your Twitter followers. Let's not bother putting you up in a hotel. Come home with me, you can spend the night with me. I'll bring you back to the airport in the morning." What do you think the reaction is going to be? 'Security!!!!' Why? Because, even though I might feel connected to Michael Phelps cause I'm one of his Twitter followers, there really isn't a relationship there. There really isn't that connection there.

So, as we consider all of this social media craze, whether you like it or you don't; whether you're involved with it or you're not, the popularity the sheer numbers of people involved in social media, has to tell us, at least to some extent, that there is a desperate longing in a high percentage of our society for connection and belonging and relationship and some sense of community. So this morning, what we want to do, is just spend some time not looking at Twitter and Facebook and all of those things, but examining how Jesus related to people around Him and maybe glean some insight and some wisdom from his example.

So this is what brings us to your handout. You'll notice it kind of looks like a Bull's Eye Target. We're just going to go through, what I call, spheres of influence that Jesus had as he

went through his ministry.

The first one, we're going to call "The Masses". It's the biggest circle. We'll call it The Masses and this is when Jesus reacts with these large, large, groups of people. You think of stories like: When Jesus feeds the 5,000, which we've talked about before was more probably like 10, 12, 20 thousand people. So these large groups of people.

On another occasion he feeds 4,000. Or in the Sermon on the Mount he goes up on a hillside and people just kind of cover the hillside below him and listen to him teach. There was one occasion, I like this story, Jesus was teaching kind of on the seashore and there was a large crowd that gathered and you know how it happens with crowds, as the crowd gets bigger everyone kind of pushes towards the stage as it were, and so Jesus is standing there on the seashore and the crowds push him and all of a sudden he notices he's standing in water and so he calls some people over and says "Let's get a boat" and so they sail out a little ways from shore so he can stand in the boat and talk to these people. There's just this huge crowd of people that have come and gathered around Jesus.

A couple weeks ago we talked about the story of the paralytic who had the four friends who brought him to Jesus. When they got to the house where Jesus was teaching they couldn't go in because the place was full. The house was jam packed. They couldn't even get in the door because there was this mass of people surrounding Jesus. Even in these huge groups of people, Jesus had this ability to somehow connect with individuals too. He would talk to large groups and there would be kind of this loose connection to the large group, but even with that he would still connect with individuals. He would often find the sick and the outcast and the lame and the blind and the people who had been rejected from society and he would find ways to reach out to them. He would find the lepers who had been deemed 'unclean' by all of society and been ostracized and he would reach out and he would touch them. He would find the man who was living in the tombs who nobody would have anything to do with him. They would shout and run away from him. And Jesus went out and connected with him. The woman, in the midst of this huge crowd, there was this woman who had bleeding that wouldn't stop. Somehow Jesus found a way in the middle of the masses, to connect with the individual.

Besides those things, there were different situations in the masses where Jesus would actually connect with someone in a way, and actually going to their house and sharing a meal with them. We have a story about Jesus and a guy named Simon the Leper. Simon invites Jesus to his house after he's been cured of leprosy and they sit down and have a meal.

Another guy just names 'the Pharisee. A Pharisee invited Jesus to his house to have supper and that's the occasion where the woman came in and cried and wet his feet with her tears and washed his feet with her hair. And that was this story there where Jesus was just sitting at people's houses sharing a meal with them, talking with them, getting to know them.

The other occasion, Nicodemus, a Pharisee, comes to Jesus in the middle of the night and

what does Jesus do? Does he say “See my assistant. Make an appointment for tomorrow at noon.” No! That’s not what he does. He says ‘Come on in, we’ll get some coffee going, we’ll sit down and chat. What’s on your mind Nicodemus?’ And so these kind of occasions where Jesus is doing this kind of communal, social, sitting together, eating together, type of activity with people.

Then you have different people kind of a different take on it, people like Zacchaeus, where Jesus is walking down the road and remember there’s a huge crowd of people, so many people that Zacchaeus, who was one of the vertically challenged people like some of us are. Zacchaeus says “If I stand in the crowd I’m not going to see anything.” So he climbs up a tree so he can see Jesus as he walks by. As he walks by, Jesus stops and looks up in the tree and he says “Zacchaeus come down for I’m going to your house.” So, he essentially, Jesus didn’t have a house so he said “I’ll invite Zacchaeus to his house”. So he says “Zacchaeus let’s go to your house and let’s share a meal together and let’s sit down and let’s get to know each other.”

Different story out of John, Chapter 4. You might be familiar with this as well. Jesus comes to a Samaritan’s City and he’s sitting outside the City at a well while the disciples go into town to get food. And Dave, you talked about Small Groups always involving food, I’m noticing a pattern in Jesus’ ministry too. There’s something about people, that we kind of like to kind of revolve things around food, a little bit. So the disciples had gone in to town to get some lunch and Jesus was sitting beside the well and a woman comes out and she has a pitcher and she’s going to draw water from the well. Initially Jesus asks her for some water. But before too long the conversation turns and Jesus is starting to offer her some water, a different kind of water, a special water, he says it’s living waters that will well up into a spring and when you drink it you’ll never be thirsty again.

And so, we see some of these kinds of experiences within the masses, where Jesus seems to kind of connect with one person and either gets invited to do something with them or invites them to come do something with him. That’s how he interacted with individuals in the masses.

Now what I also found interesting about life in the sphere of the masses is: The masses often contained a rather large contingent of Jesus’ enemies. Of his detractors. Of people who were there trying to work against Jesus. They were also out in the masses somewhere floating around and Jesus obviously had to deal with them at times, as well.

So let’s bring it in a little smaller here, we’ll push those guys out to the side, and then go to the next inner-sphere of influence. When the woman at the well, that we were just talking about, after Jesus talked with her for awhile, she realizes who Jesus is and she runs back into town and starts telling everyone about this guy she’s just met and she says “Could he be the Messiah? I think he is. Come out and check it out for yourself.” And the text says that she brought the whole town out to meet Jesus. And so the whole town comes out and there

again we're in the masses. Jesus stays with them for a couple of days and then John says: "When Jesus left, many of the people believed in Jesus."

So that's when we get this next sphere. Out of the masses, we have this next sphere of people who become followers of Jesus. Similar with the story, Jesus heals ten lepers one time. He heals them and he sends them off to the priests and nine of them get healed and they take off and we never see them again. One of them comes back and says: "There's something special about this guy named Jesus. I need to investigate more. I need to get to know him better."

So, that's what the followers are all about. The followers are the ones who learned Jesus' teachings. The ones who obey Jesus' instructions. The ones who try to imitate Jesus' example. Whenever Jesus came through town, cause he kind of wandered around Israel a lot, and whenever he came to town his followers would be the ones who could go to see him. To go listen to him talk. To go watch him interact with the crowds and to learn more of what he was all about. Now, out of that group of followers, a portion of that group would actually follow Jesus around. Lots of people would just live where they lived and do what they did and when Jesus came to town they would go out to see him. But there was a group of people who actually kind of followed him around wherever he went. Some of them followed him from town-to-town. In the story of the feeding of the 5,000, it actually starts by Jesus and the disciples getting in a boat and sailing off to the other side of the Lake and the reason he has to feed 5,000 people is because they all followed him. They walked around the Lake and met him on the other side. And actually, when they leave, the people do the same thing, they follow them all the way back to the other side. And so, there's kind of this group of people within the followers who actually, physically follow Jesus around, walk around with him and stay close to him. They kind of have that extra level of contact with Jesus than maybe some of the other people had. Out of that group, in Luke Chapter 10, he picks 72 of them. He takes these 72 people, these are people who are more at the core of Jesus' followers and he gives them some instructions and he says: "I'm going to send you guys out and I want you to go out and preach the Good News. So here's what I want you to do." And he preps them and he sends them out and they go out and then they come back and after they come back there's this kind of time of de-briefing and they all sit around and report what they did and how it went and so you kind of see a more 'hands on' approach with Jesus and this group of people.

Well, out of that smaller group of people, Jesus selects 12 of his very close companions and these people spent most of their time with Jesus. They saw his miracles, they heard his teaching. Sometimes actually these 12 would go away from the crowds, just Jesus and the 12 of them would go away to be alone together. Sometimes often after Jesus' teaching he would tell several parables to the crowd and then he'll take the 12 aside and say "Okay, now here's what that means." And he would give them some extra explanation and extra insight into some of his teachings as well. These are the guys who would have been around the table at the Last Supper when Jesus was there. So these people would be at the core. And

you would think that's got to be the smallest group, the 12, but there's one more. Even out of that close knit group there were three or four that seemed to have an even more personal relationship with Jesus. These were guys like Peter, James and John and sometimes Andrew. I don't know why, sometimes Andrew, and I don't know why sometimes not, but there it is. Peter, James and John, sometimes Andrew and they seemed to have this kind of extra-special relationship with Jesus and they would spend extra time alone with him. There were certain significant discussions that happened in the Gospel text that really, it's only Jesus and Peter and James and John that were there for those discussions. Peter's the guy who walked on water. That's a little different. Peter and John are the ones who ran out to the tomb when Jesus was raised. In Luke Chapter 9, Jesus goes to raise Jairus' daughter and when he gets to the house he takes Peter, James and John inside with him.

In Matthew, Chapter 17, they go to the mountain and Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain and he's transformed and his Heavenly Glory is revealed with those three guys standing there.

In Mark, Chapter 14, when Jesus goes to the Garden of Gethsemane he goes with 11 of his disciples, Judas has already taken off and so the 11 go to the Garden and then he takes Peter, James and John and he says "Come a little further alone with me guys." And they go a little further and he asked them to pray and he goes out and prays on his own. So there's kind of this little, just a little more personal, a little more investment, a little more hands-on relationship with Jesus and these three. Kind of in a way, we might also throw in Mary, Martha and Lazarus, who weren't part of the 12 but, as you read through the Gospels you see this special kind of relationship between Jesus and Mary, Martha and Lazarus. He makes several trips to Bethany and he stays at their house and he eats meals with them and when Lazarus dies, he comes and people can see how close he was to them and how connected he was to them. Maybe that's kind of a different slant on some of the same principle with Jesus.

Jesus relates to people in different ways and on different levels. Some of them had frequent interaction, some of them are one-time meetings. Some of them are very close and personal dealings, some of them are large group communications. Some of them develop into very deep relationships, where others are just introductions.

If we were to take that chart then, and try and transpose it into our 21<sup>st</sup> Century lives, I spent some time thinking: "Well, what would that look like and what would those kind of spheres of influence fit in my life and in our World." So here's kind of what I came up with. See if this fits for you.

The 'Masses' are going to be kind of the World, the people, the society around us. Our friends, our family, our co-workers, classmates, neighbours....these people. Just kind of the people around us. That's going to be the masses, isn't it?

And then, come in one circle to the 'Followers'. And our followers well, that's going to be

The Church and maybe more specific for our context, that's going to be our Church Family, this congregation here. That's going to be our 'Followers' group, as far as things go. We are the people who learn Jesus' teachings, obey his instructions, imitate his examples. We kind of all fit into that green sphere there.

Now, there's a general connection between all of us we share a common faith. You probably have a deeper connection here with some people than you do with other people and that's just normal because in a group this size we can't all be super close and super connected, that's just the way it is. But we all share a common faith together and that's what binds us in this common sphere of influence.

And then in the 12, that's usually where we try and stick our small groups in, and have our small groups try and meet that niche if you would, it's about the right size our small groups are usually up to about 12 adults so that kind of fits numerically. The groups kind of have that more regular contact to them. Stronger relationships; more interaction; more personal discussions that occur within your small group family. So that seems like a natural place for us to stick that, most of the time. Now, since this is the first day to sign up for small groups, I thought this might be a good chance for a quick aside; to talk about them just a little bit. Our small groups are called "FISH" groups. I was discussing this with my wife a while back and she said she didn't think you guys could remember what the acronym "FISH" stood for. And I stood up for you and I said "Oh yeah! They will." And so, this is your opportunity to prove me right and I would appreciate you helping me out with that. We call them Fish Groups because there's four main goals that we try to accomplish with our Small Group program. The first one starts with the letter "F" and it is, "Friendship". I knew three years ago when I put Friendship instead of Fellowship, everyone was going to say Fellowship. But we picked "Friendship". We said we want our groups to build friendships, right? To build relationships with people. So that's one of the things we do.

The "I" stands for...Issues. That's right! In our small groups we like to discuss real life issues and stuff that really applies to our lives and stuff we like to see what does God's word have to say to those real life situations and real life issues that we deal with.

"S".. Serving others, that's right. Somehow we wanted our Groups to be a vehicle for us to find opportunities to serve other people and:

"H"...Hospitality. You guys are fantastic!!! Show hospitality. We wanted to have an opportunity through our groups to show hospitality to other people. Really, by saying that, we're meaning an opportunity to reach out with some other people and connect with them and that's what we are hoping our Fish Groups would do.

Now, I can tell you all about what groups have been like. I could say "Groups are awesome and you should be a part of Groups and you should join a Group and they are the most fantastic thing in the World." And you would sit there and say "Yeah, he's supposed to say

that. That's his job to say that. He's supposed to hype things up a little bit." And so, I decided what I would do this morning, instead of me telling you, here's what has been good and beneficial about groups over the last few years, I would let someone who you trust a little bit more say it. You! So, Reid's got a microphone over there and so I would like you to share with us, just randomly people in this group, share with us some things you've enjoyed about Groups over the past couple of years, maybe say how you've been blessed by being in a Group over the last couple of years. Or maybe say "The best part about being in a group is\_\_\_\_\_.

So, if you have something to share along those lines just raise your hands and Reid is going to run over to you with the microphone so everyone can hear your insightful comments and we're going to spend a couple of minutes letting you share with each other what Groups might be able to do. Who is brave and going first?

"I think the best part about small groups is, getting to know people that you wouldn't talk to otherwise, cause there's a lot of people here and you don't always have the time to visit with everybody after Church so when you go to Small Groups and there's only a few people then you get to talk to everybody and you get to know them all. I like that part."

"Actually, one of the things I really liked, especially in the early days, was after the study or the organized part was done, the guys would often go downstairs and play pool and the rest of us would stay upstairs and do puzzles, or whatever, and some of the best discussions, I think, happened in those hours, until midnight or something like that. And even now, I remember thinking that Robin and Joyce and Diane, those guys were in my group, at that time were significantly younger, now less younger than me????? I still feel connected, even though they've gone on to do different things. I still feel connected to them."

Those aren't the things you can plan either. Like you can't scrip those. You can't make questions for those. You can't schedule those. You just gotta be together, right?

"One of the interesting things is, you get to hear from people who don't normally speak. There are many people who are scared to speak in public. But in small groups, they open up. The other thing I've found very interesting was.....I'm trying to think how to phrase it???? Well, we got to hang out with old people....Marvin was in our group and Hugh and Irene and we were in Barb and Dave's group too, and they're old people, so we get to hear the wisdom of old people."

I was sure Roy was going to say "Potlucks", but....

"I just found that with our service projects, you got to do things that you may have always wanted to do but you didn't do them by yourself, and so there's strength in numbers and maybe more courage in numbers, and you put yourself into situations that you might not normally do."



“A group we were in a few years ago, a large majority of our group went through some really difficult times that year and we were able to be there for each other in a way that we wouldn’t have known to be otherwise.”

Again, with what Monica said, you can’t just run to those things when you need that connection and that’s the benefit of being there week after week after week....when things are going well, then when the bottom falls out, that’s already there.

“I learned a lot in our Wednesday night classes, but I learned more in our Fish Groups.”

“For the hospitality one, I know a couple of our groups always seemed to, and I think that was the idea of it, was to have hospitality outside of your Church Family. So that really allowed you to get out there and show your Christianity to others who might not be Christians or attending a Church so that was a good thing too.”

That’s some reflection from people of what Groups have done for them and how they’ve helped them through the past few years. So again, as we look at what we’ve done with Groups over the past. Generally speaking, we’ve put it in the sphere of the 12. And before I move and talk any more about that, there’s some questions printed at the bottom of your handout. I want to take a minute and look at that diagram at the way that’s split up and lined up for you....and answer these questions. I’m going to read them out. Don’t rush ahead, just kind of make a mark as to where these questions fit in.

....Which of these spheres do you feel most comfortable in? Where do you feel most natural and at home in as a person?

....In which of those spheres do you feel like your faith is being most consistently lived out in?

Give that some thought for just a minute.

....Which of those spheres do you kind of feel like, you say...in this sphere, this is where my faith is most inconsistently lived out.

The next couple questions reflect on us as a group, as a Church family.

....In which of those spheres do you feel like we, as a faith community, are having the most collective impact? Where do you think our influence is the strongest all of those spheres? And maybe not only is it the strongest, but how does our collective influence manifest itself in those different places and different spheres?

....Which of those spheres do you feel like....You know, as a group, this is probably where our collective influence is the most sporadic or the weakest, or the whatever???

I hope that gives you some food for thought. I know when I went through that exercise, some of them I came up with the answers right away. Some of them I came up with the answer right away...then I thought about it and I thought...Well, you know what, maybe that's not as clear cut as I thought it was. Maybe that will give you something to think about this week as you go through your week and reflect back on it a little bit.

I just want to talk just for a moment here about our Small Groups. I was really encouraged by the comments you shared so thank you for doing that. Just purely for my sake. But encouraged by the diversity in the comments you shared and I think that's very exciting and wonderful. I kind of reflected over the past few years in our small groups and I think, for the most part, we'd agree that our small groups have kind of swam in the waters of the 12. Kind of in that sphere, in that circle. We're focused on things like fellowship and building relationships with a small group of people. Focused on study and discussion of God's word and we've tried to expand that a little bit and I think that's valuable. But I think, for the most part, we've been in that circle, more or less, but as we dreamed about what we'd like to see our Fish Groups become this year, I thought about it and wondered...what if we just blew up that whole thing and instead of Small Groups just being in the 12, what if they were everywhere? What if they reached out into all of those different spheres? What if, instead of just focusing primarily on our Small Group, we focused on relating to and impacting people, in all our various spheres of influence? What if we looked back at Jesus' example of relating to and connecting to people and tried to imitate some of that in our own lives? What if we said "Well, let's have times of fellowship and discussion where our Small Group can meet regularly and build relationships with each other and spend time studying God's word and applying it to our everyday lives as we've been committed to doing over the past years and then...what about if we took that and occasionally went a little bit smaller and had opportunities where two or three couples got the chance to just get together just the two of them spending time together, developing that relationship that you can't even do in the group of 12. Maybe times to be together one-on-one.

And then, what if we went the other way with things and instead of going smaller, we go bigger? And what if we took say three of our different small groups and on occasion, let's bring three of them together, so we've got this bigger group of people together. And that's great because you know what? There's people who I'd really like to get to spend some time with but they're not in my group. And so I wish I could be in this group but if I go to that group then I'm not getting to spend time with these people! So what if we just said "you know what, once in a while let's just put three of them together and they can all be together and spend time together and build relationships together. Maybe even spend a little time at the end worshipping together. And wouldn't that be a wonderful exciting opportunity for us to have. And I thought we should go even farther than that. What if we take this idea of hospitality which we've had through the years and continue to spend time with the people in our outer sphere of our influence. To share a meal like Jesus did with Simon or with the Pharisee, or to just hang out with people like Jesus did with Nicodemus. What if we spend

time building relational bridges? What if we went to the other side of that circle and what if we had opportunities to invite people to connect with us. Invite people from our outer sphere to come to our inner sphere, even just for a brief moment and experience even for a moment, what that environment is like and what being people who follow Jesus has done for us. To do something like Jesus did with Zacchaeus and the woman at the well, and invite them to experience something different that they haven't ever felt before. Or maybe we could just spend time continuing to build occasions where we could go out as a group into our community and share God's love. To care for, to help, to show kindness to people who are in need. To bless others with the blessings that God has given us, just like Jesus did with the blind and the sick and the outcast and the hurting. And I imagined to myself over the past couple of weeks, what would happen if all of those, what if's, became when's. Then I got really excited about what this year might have in store for us. Not just because of variety for varieties sake, but because there would be a weekly opportunity for me to connect with people across the spectrum of my sphere's of influence, just like Jesus did.

When I thought about a Group experience that would allow me to do that, to connect with all different people in all different places in different ways, I thought now, that's the kind of Group that I would like to be a part of. That's the kind of Group that I can invest something into. The kind of Group that I am confident that I am going to be blessed by being a part of.

And so, as we look forward to the Fall and our Groups starting up, I hope you will feel that way too. If you've been in a Small Group before and it didn't really work out for you, and I'm sure some of you have had those experiences, I encourage you to give this year's Fish Groups a chance. Because this year, you might actually have a totally different experience than your past. If you've been in Fish Groups before and enjoyed them, I encourage you to join them again, because this year could actually be different and better than what you've experienced in the past. If you've never been involved with a Small Group, I encourage you to just give 'em a shot. See what you think. You don't have to commit every week for the whole year, just say "you know what, I'm going to sign up with this group and I'm going to try six weeks and see what I think." And if you try six weeks and you decide, you know what, this isn't for me right now, that's fine. But give it a shot. Check it out. See what you think.

Our Groups are coming up, the sign-up sheets are in the foyer. I encourage you to partake in them, because I think, and I'm not just saying this because it's my job to get up here and get as many people to sign up for groups as I possibly can, I'm saying this because I really feel like, if we could follow that kind of pattern, that kind of example that Jesus has led for us. If I could be a part of a Group that allowed me, that gave me that time and space to do these things; that gave me that kind of encouragement and accountability from my fellow Christians to actually get some of this stuff done; if I could be a part of that, I see that as being a wonderful, exciting, promising, experience for me. But, it can't just be me because that's a Small Group of one and that doesn't work. So what I'm saying is, I need your help. Please sign up for the Groups so that you can encourage the rest of us to be a part of our

Groups this year. Sign up sheets will be there for a couple of weeks and then we'll start on September the 9<sup>th</sup>, right after the long weekend.