

Becoming a Member of a Covenant Family (House Church)

Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-37; Luke 10:1-24; Matt. 6:33, 28:18-20

Welcome: Your Father in heaven loves you, and so do we! You can become His son or daughter through Christ by the Holy Spirit. God is One, yet reveals Himself in three persons, Father, Son, Holy Spirit: a Family of One. Because of this, Father builds His kingdom relationally through natural and spiritual families. Every person who has placed his/her faith in Christ and is indwelt with His Spirit is a child of God and part of His universal Family – the Church. At the same time, we are to connect deeply with a local spiritual family so that we can 1) help one another become like Christ, and 2) work together to advance Christ’s kingdom in cities, regions, and nations. We would be thrilled if Father leads you into the Rock International Family. There are two ways you can know this. First, if in your mind and heart you come into unity with the values, vision, strategy, and leadership of the Rock International Tribe. Second, if you sense in your spirit/heart that the Holy Spirit is placing you into this family, and the leadership believes the same thing. There is an objective standard of determining family membership based in agreement around the person of Christ, The people of Christ, and the purpose of Christ as it has been given to the Rock International Tribe. There is also a subjective witness of the Holy Spirit to you and the other Rock International family members that Father has joined you to this spiritual family.

Introducing Regional or City-Wide ROCenters and Covenant Families (House Churches):

Because unity of head, heart, and hands (reaching out together) is so essential to advancing Christ’s kingdom in cities and regions, we must all understand and agree upon biblical core values, vision, and strategy. These are all written out for you to research and pray about. We will discuss the biblical core values, vision, and strategy of our ROCenters in a face-to-face orientation time, so that we can process in more depth what we are to be and do in Christ.

One of our five strategies to advancing the kingdom of God in a ROCenter is to help each disciple of Christ become a vital member of a Covenant Family (House Church or Kingdom Family Platoon). This is the best Biblical strategy for 1) helping you become like Christ (Rom. 8:29; 2 Cor. 3:18), 2) training you to help others become like Christ (Matt. 28:18-20), and 3) organically and relationally expanding the kingdom of God in cities, regions and nations (Matt.6:10,33). Jesus, who focused his training on twelve disciples (Mark 3:13-19), Moses, who gathered the Israelites in groups of tens (Exodus 18:13-27), and the Holy Spirit led early church which met “house-to-house” (Acts 2:42-47, 20:20; Ro. 16:5) all modeled the necessity of discipleship and missions through small covenant groups. In the traditional or institutional church organizations, people can too easily hide in larger meetings and programs. Personal issues of heart motives, mental and emotional struggles, and day-to-day kingdom living tend to be neglected in religious settings that do not promote transparent, heart-to-heart, covenant

family relationships. The Rock International Family hopes to serve the whole body of Christ (including local churches) by encouraging, teaching, and modeling prayer, evangelism, and discipleship within the context of covenant families (house churches).

What Is a Covenant Family (House Church)?

Definition: A Covenant family is made up of at least three people but no more than twenty (one of whom is a qualified leader and the other one is an apprentice leader). They connect around the lordship and person of Christ and His manifest presence and glory as both a lifestyle and in a gathering at least once a week. They connect in deep loving relationships for the purpose of enabling one another to be radical disciples of Christ, reach the lost, advance the Kingdom of God in all areas of life in their cities/communities, and multiply more covenant families. "R.O.C.K." stands for Reclaiming Of Christ's Kingdom. Christ, God's manifest presence and glory, spreading the love of the Father by the Holy Spirit, and the advancing of Christ's Kingdom are the passions and missions of a covenant family (house church).

1. Covenant families are a spiritual family – people connected covenantally heart-to-heart around Christ in order to advance His kingdom and help each person become like Christ. I Cor. 4:15-17; Eph. 3:14
2. Covenant families are a group of friends unified around Christ's love and mission. Matt. 11:19; Jn. 15:12-17
3. Covenant families are a healing community that prays for the sick, counsels the confused, carries out inner healing, sets people free from curses and demonic bondage, and creates such an atmosphere of acceptance and love that rejection and insecurities are displaced automatically over time. James 5:16; Matt. 10:1,8
4. Covenant families are a training and equipping center, a safe setting for people to practice leadership, management, preaching, teaching, creative ministry, spiritual gifts, and all forms of servanthood. Matt. 28:18-20
5. Covenant families are a missionary team and spiritual army – a flexible, spontaneous, organized platoon capable of reaching those who do not follow Christ and are not in a spiritual family. They are dedicated to seeking and saving the lost, delivering people from demonic bondage, doing justice, and serving youth, poor, widow, orphan, and alien. Luke 19:10; Eph. 6:10-18
6. Covenant families are a lifestyle of deep, intentional, meaningful relationships that connect any time and place with an ultimate goal to reach lost people, and transform communities through Christ and the Kingdom of God. Acts 2:42-47, 4:32-35.

Important Perspective:

The starting and multiplying of covenant families (house churches) must occur under biblical heart motives and core values in order to receive the full enabling presence and power of the Holy Spirit. It takes the supernatural life of Christ to sustain Christ-centered relationships. A warning label should be attached to any document which tries to explain or instruct people about covenant families: **Warning: Do not attempt to start, grow, or multiply covenant**

families (house churches) as another church program or evangelistic strategy. Covenant families will only work to the degree each individual and the group as a whole have died to themselves and are governed and empowered by the indwelling Lord, Jesus Christ, and his Word by the Holy Spirit.

One more key point must be made regarding the reason for writing down the purposes, expectations, and commitments of covenant families. All of the contents of this overview should be understood as instructions on ***how to love God and people in a way that advances Christ's kingdom***. It should **not** be viewed as a rule book or religious document that has to be mechanically applied. **This overview is to help coach people into a lifestyle of loving relationships**. Every expectation or recommendation has Biblical wisdom and truth, with the ultimate intention that the greatest amount of Christ's love gets spread to the most people in the highest quality way in the least amount of time. Because people are suffering and dying, our mission is time-sensitive.

Truth exists for love. So many people come from dysfunctional families and/or unhealthy churches (or no church background at all), that it takes clear teaching and constant coaching to help people walk in God's ways of combined truth and love. Most people have very little understanding as to the etiquette of relationships and group life within the context and government of a healthy spiritual family. The spirit of this document is to promote the life and love of Christ within individuals and covenant families, and should in no way be used legalistically, so that people are judged or rejected. Covenant families should be the safest, most loving, life-giving settings on earth. But true safety involves accountability and discipline along with unconditional affection and love, just like a healthy family. **Bottom line: covenant families (house churches) should feel as much like heaven on earth as possible!**

The key to advancing the kingdom of God on earth is for lovers of Christ to exchange the life of Christ between each other in the context of covenantally connected Christ-centered relationships. Because the kingdom of God involves coming under the Lordship of Christ in every sphere of life, those in the covenant families learn to submit to Christ in one another and assist each other in following Christ completely.

Perspective on Shifting Into a Biblical Paradigm of Kingdom Life Together:

In order for covenant families (house churches) to be viewed and experienced as the primary context for church life, there must be a significant paradigm shift in the hearts and minds of God's people. Being in a true Book of Acts house church is really a major shift of perspective, values and lifestyle. Usually this does not occur unless there is a 1) high level of discontentment, dissatisfaction, and internal and external pain and pressure, 2) a high degree of promise and pleasure that come from both the manifest presence of Christ and authentic covenant love between the members, and 3) willingness to make the sacrifices necessary to reach the lost and transform communities.

Commitments and Expectations of Covenant Family Members:

These commitments and expectations should be presented in writing and discussed with each *person at the beginning of his/her involvement in the covenant family (house church)*. They should also be reviewed regularly with all members. Clear expectations help people know how to come into unity with the person, people, and purpose of Christ. Skilled leadership, spiritual parenting, and clear expectations create a safe and secure setting for people to mature in Christ.

One becomes a member of a local “ROCenter” and the Rock International Tribe by becoming a son or daughter of Father through Christ by the Holy Spirit and becoming an active member of a covenant family. Remember: **These commitments and expectations are not rules and regulations. They are helpful guidelines and principles which enable us to love Christ, one another and unbelievers more effectively. Here is what we aspire to be and do:**

1. We are **committed to experience freedom in Christ, and to help others do the same.** We sincerely seek to know God through Christ, to the end that others become born again, Spirit-filled, real disciples of Christ, being transformed into His likeness. By joining a covenant family, we are inviting the leaders and other members to help us follow Christ and grow into His likeness.
2. We are **committed to being of one heart and mind with one another** (Acts 4:32). To the best of our ability, we strive to understand and submit to the values, vision, strategies, and expectations of the leaders of our covenant family, the local elders, and the leadership team of Rock International.
3. We are **committed to participate weekly in the corporate life and activities** of the covenant family, and regularly attend our ROCenters city-wide or regional celebrations and training. We honor and worship God and help advance His kingdom by giving tithes and offerings through ROCenters, our local storehouse.
4. We are **committed to grace affirmation:** (unconditional love, agape love) Colossians 3:5-14 *“I will choose to love you, build you up, and accept you, my brothers and sisters, no matter what you say or do. I will choose to love you in whatever form you come. There is nothing you have done or will do that will make me stop loving you. I may not agree with your actions, but I will love you as a person and do all I can to hold you up in God’s affirming love.”*
5. We are **committed to honesty:** Ephesians 4:25-32 *“Good or bad, I will not hide from you what I see in you or coming from you. In the timing of the Spirit, I will deal openly and directly with you in a loving and forgiving way so that you are*

affirmed when in need, and so that our frustration with each other does not lead to bitterness. I will try to mirror back to you what I am hearing you say and feel. If this means risking pain, realizing it is in “speaking the truth in love that we grow up in every way into Christ who is the head” (Ephesians 4:15), then I will take the risk. I will try to express this honesty in a sensitive and controlled manner and to meter it, according to what I perceive the circumstances to be.”

6. We are **committed to openness**: Romans 7:15-25 *“I will strive to become a more open person, disclosing my feelings, my struggles, my joys and my hurts to you as well as I am able. The degree to which I do so implies that I cannot make it without you. This is to affirm your worth to me as a person. In other words, I need you!”*
7. We are **committed to prayer and fasting**: Matt.6:9,16-18; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12 *“I commit to pray for you regularly, believing that our caring Father wishes His children to pray for one another and ask Him for the blessings we all need. I will not be merely a passive listener. Rather, I choose to be a spiritual participant, willing to enter into your situation and prayerfully helping to shoulder your burden.”*
8. We are **committed to sensitivity**: John 4:1-29 *“Even as I desire to be known and understood by you, I commit to be sensitive to you and your needs to the best of my ability. I will try to hear you, see you, and feel where you are and to draw you out of the pit of discouragement or withdrawal. I will earnestly avoid giving ‘simplistic’ answers to the difficult situations you may find yourself in.”*
9. We are **committed to availability**: Acts 2:43-47 *“Here I am if you need me. Anything I have--time, energy, insight, possessions--is at your disposal, if you need it, to the limit of my resources. I will open my heart, my home, and my life to help you become more like Jesus.”*
10. We are **committed to confidentiality**: Proverbs 10:19; 11:9,13; 12:23; 13:3; 15:4; 18:6-8 *“I will keep whatever is shared within the confines of the house church in order to provide the atmosphere of trust necessary for openness. I understand, however, that this confidentiality does not prohibit my covenant family leader from sharing either verbally or in written form any pertinent information with the elders of our local “ROCenter. I understand that covenant family leaders function under pastoral/elder oversight, having delegated authority as an extension of the pastoral care ministry of our “ROCenter. As a result, they are accountable to the elder(s) of this spiritual family, who are themselves accountable to others in ministry and the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ, my Lord.” (Hebrews 13:17)*
11. We are **committed to accountability and confession of sin**: (Ezekiel 3:16-21; Matthew 18:12-30; James 5:16) *“I commit to growth, maturity and discipleship using the Bible and other equipping materials that each of the house churches in*

our spiritual family are progressing through as part of their equipping times, and in doing so will make myself accountable weekly to my accountability partner in the covenant family. I give you the right to question, confront, and challenge me in love when I seem to be falling in any aspect of my life under God--family, devotions, general spiritual growth, etc. I trust you to be in the Spirit and led of Him when you do so. I need your correction and reproof so that I may ever better fulfill God-given ministry among you. I will try not to be defensive.” (Proverbs 12:1,15; 13:10,18).”

12. We are **committed to following the biblical process of conflict resolution.** (Matt. 18, Gal. 6:1-5) *“We will not triangulate, gossip, or slander our brothers or sisters in Christ. We will deal with offenses with truth and love. Disagreements or conflicts should in no way divide our hearts or justify a breach in relationship or closing.”*
13. We are **committed to time regularity:** (Heb. 10:25; Luke 9:57-62) *“I will regard the regular time which my covenant family spends together weekly as time under the disciplining hand of Jesus in our midst. I will not grieve the Spirit or hinder His work in the lives of my brothers and sisters by my absence, except in an emergency. By His permission, and through prayer alone, will I consider being absent. If I am unable to attend for any reason, out of consideration I will call my covenant family leader in order that the covenant family members may know why I am absent, will be able to pray for me, and will not worry about me.”*
14. We are **committed to outreach:** Matthew 25:31-46 *“I will find ways to sacrifice myself for those outside our covenant family and our ROCenter in the same way that I have committed to sacrifice myself for you, my brothers and sisters. I will network in prayer and relationships with my fellow covenant family members to evangelize and disciple unbelievers or unchurched friends outside of the house church meeting during the course of its life. I will do it in Jesus’ Name so that others are added to the Kingdom of God in His love. I will consider becoming a member of a Search & Rescue Team (2 to 3 people committed to reaching out and loving those who don’t yet know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior)”. See Search & Rescue Teams handout.*
15. We are **committed to serving and giving time, talents, gifts, and finances** to the purpose of advancing the kingdom in cities, regions, and nations. *“I will give tithes, offerings, first fruits to the Lord through our local ROCenter in order to provide the resources necessary to fulfill our mission.” (2 Cor. 9:6-15).*