

TRBC ROCK GROUP LEADER TRAINING MANUAL

**Developing Healthy Leaders for Healthy Rock
Groups**

July 10-11, 2026



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Introduction

Welcome to Rock Group leadership at TRBC.

Rock Groups are the primary environment where discipleship, fellowship, care, ministry, and evangelism are lived out on a personal level. While worship services gather the church together, Rock Groups help people grow deeper in their relationship with Jesus and one another.

As a Rock Group leader, you are not expected to have all the answers. Your role is to create an environment where people can encounter God, build meaningful relationships, grow through Scripture, serve others, and reach people with the gospel.

This manual provides the foundational principles and practical tools necessary for leading a healthy, thriving Rock Group.

SESSION ONE

The Purpose and Mission of Rock Groups

Why Rock Groups Matter

Rock Groups exist to:

1. Deepen our relationship with God and others.
2. Help members live out the Great Commandment and Great Commission.
3. Create environments of care and spiritual growth.
4. Support biblical discipleship through house-to-house ministry.
5. Provide a pathway for evangelism, ministry, and leadership development.

Biblical Foundation

The early church modeled many of the characteristics that healthy Rock Groups seek to cultivate:

- Faith in Christ
- Baptism

- Church membership
- Biblical learning
- Fellowship
- Generosity
- Prayer
- Worship
- Evangelism

(Acts 2:41–47)

TRBC Vision

Our Vision

To see every individual thrive in their relationship with Jesus.

A thriving person understands who they are in Christ, discovers God's purpose for their life, and experiences true meaning and fulfillment.

TRBC Mission

The gospel compels us to:

- Love God
- Love Unity
- Love Community

The gospel reshapes lives, reaches families, revitalizes churches, and rebuilds communities.

Because the gospel changes everything.

TRBC Values

We value:

- Worship – We celebrate Jesus.
- Testimony – We highlight what God highlights.
- Welcome – We are a welcoming church.
- Growth – We value healthy, growing churches.
- Salvation – Every soul matters.
- Authority – We value God's Word.
- Prayer – We depend on God.

TRBC: A Church OF Small Groups

Healthy churches do not simply have small groups.

Healthy churches become churches OF small groups.

Characteristics include:

Multiplication

Groups continually raise up new leaders and start new groups.

Discipleship

Most personal spiritual growth happens through relationships in groups.

Pastoral Care

Members receive encouragement, support, and accountability through group life.

Mission

Groups actively reach people who are far from God.

Holistic Ministry

Groups pursue five essential purposes:

- Fellowship
 - Discipleship
 - Worship
 - Ministry
 - Evangelism
-

SESSION TWO

Welcome and Worship

The Five W's of Healthy Rock Groups

Healthy groups intentionally focus on:

1. Welcome
2. Worship
3. Word
4. Work
5. Witness

The first two elements establish the spiritual and relational foundation for group life.

WELCOME

Building Care and Community

People rarely grow spiritually before they feel relationally safe.

Rock Group leaders cultivate an environment where people are:

- Known
- Loved
- Accepted
- Encouraged
- Supported

Biblical Practices

Love and Honor One Another

- John 13:34–35
- Romans 12:10

Accept and Pray for One Another

- Romans 14:1
- Ephesians 6:18

Encourage One Another

- 1 Thessalonians 5:11
- Hebrews 10:24–25

Forgive One Another

- Ephesians 4:32

Submit to One Another

- Ephesians 5:21
- 1 Peter 5:5

Practical Ways to Build Community

- Begin with intentional conversation.
 - Celebrate victories together.
 - Share prayer requests.
 - Follow up during the week.
 - Serve together.
 - Create opportunities for vulnerability and trust.
-

WORSHIP

Exalting God Together

Worship in a Rock Group allows every member to participate actively.

Unlike large gatherings, small groups create opportunities for interaction, testimony, and prayer.

Expressions of Worship

Thanksgiving

Invite each member to share one specific thing they are thankful for.

Prayer

Pause and pray whenever needs arise.

Music

Use worship music to create a reflective atmosphere.

Testimonies

Share stories of God's faithfulness.

Scripture Reflection

Meditate together on God's Word.

Silence

Allow moments for personal reflection and listening prayer.

Goal of Worship

The goal is not performance.

The goal is helping people encounter and respond to God.

SESSION THREE

Work and Witness

WORK

Serving Together

Every believer has a ministry.

Biblical Foundations

- Mark 10:45
- 1 Corinthians 12:20–22

Why Service Matters

Serving:

- Develops spiritual gifts.
- Builds unity.
- Encourages spiritual growth.
- Opens doors for evangelism.
- Demonstrates God's love.

Group Service Ideas

- Community outreach projects
- Food distribution
- Neighborhood cleanup efforts
- Nursing home visits
- School partnerships
- Church service projects
- Supporting families in crisis

Leadership Principle

Every member is a minister.

The leader's role is to equip and mobilize others.

WITNESS

Reaching People for Christ

Healthy groups maintain an outward focus.

The Evangelism Pathway

Faith

Believe God desires people to be saved.

Pray

Pray consistently for unbelievers.

Love

Demonstrate Christ's love.

Invite

Invite people into community.

Gospel

Clearly share the message of salvation.

Process

Remain patient and persistent.

Party

Use social events to build relationships.

Testimony

Share personal stories of transformation.

Celebration

Celebrate every life changed by Christ.

Luke 15 reminds us that heaven rejoices when people come to faith.

SESSION FOUR

The Word

Studying Scripture Together

Rock Groups are not merely discussion groups.

They are environments where people encounter God's truth and apply it to everyday life.

Bible Study Method

Observation

What does the passage say?

Questions:

- Who wrote it?
- Who received it?
- What stands out?
- What is happening?

Interpretation

What does the passage mean?

Questions:

- What is the author's main point?
- What truths are revealed?
- How would you summarize the passage?

Application

What should I do?

Questions:

- What is God calling me to believe?
 - What is God calling me to change?
 - What action should I take this week?
-

Helpful Study Resources

- Blue Letter Bible
 - Bible Study Tools
 - Got Questions
 - ESV Study Bible
 - CSB Study Bible
 - NKJV Study Bible
-

Leading Discussions

Introduce the Passage

Create curiosity and engagement.

Guide Discovery

Ask thoughtful questions.

Summarize Key Truths

Highlight major insights.

Encourage Application

Move from information to transformation.

SESSION FIVE

Essential Leadership Skills

Ask Better Questions

Great leaders facilitate discussion instead of delivering lectures.

Open-Ended Questions

Use:

- What?
- Why?
- How?

Avoid questions that can be answered with yes or no.

Follow-Up Questions

Examples:

- Can you tell us more?
- Why do you think that?
- What led you to that conclusion?

Application Questions

Examples:

- How does this affect your life?
- What needs to change?
- What step will you take this week?

Perspective Questions

Help members explore different viewpoints and insights from Scripture.

Create a Safe Environment

Establish a Group Covenant

Review expectations at the beginning of the group.

Protect Confidentiality

"What is shared here stays here."

Handle Mistakes Gracefully

Correct gently and respectfully.

Avoid Unsolicited Advice

Listen first.

Build Trust

Trust develops through consistency, honesty, and care.

Managing Challenging Personalities

The Over-Talker

Redirect discussion gently.

The Non-Talker

Invite participation without pressure.

The Rabbit Chaser

Bring conversation back to the topic.

The Hobby Horse Rider

Prevent recurring distractions.

The Insensitive Person

Model grace while protecting group safety.

Maintaining Spiritual Health

Leaders should prioritize:

- Personal holiness
- Consistent prayer
- Scripture engagement
- Dependence on God
- Caring for group members during difficult seasons

Healthy leaders cultivate healthy groups.

SESSION SIX

Developing Apprentice Leaders

Why Apprentices Matter

Healthy groups multiply.

Multiplication requires intentional leadership development.

The F.A.I.T.H. Framework

Look for people who are:

Faithful

Consistent and dependable.

Available

Willing to prioritize growth and leadership.

Initiative

Take action without constant direction.

Teachable

Open to learning and correction.

Honest

Operate with integrity.

The ICNU Conversation

"I See In You..."

Tell potential apprentices:

- What gifts you see.
 - Why you believe they can lead.
 - What the process involves.
 - What the future opportunity may be.
-

The Show-How Model

Stage 1

I do, you watch.

Stage 2

I do, you help.

Stage 3

You do, I help.

Stage 4

You do, I watch.

Leadership development happens through experience, coaching, and feedback.

Connect

Ensure apprentices receive:

- Ongoing coaching
 - Training opportunities
 - Church support
 - Access to ministry resources
-

Release

When ready:

- Launch a new group.
- Lead an existing group.
- Multiply the current group.

Continue encouraging and supporting new leaders.

Final Encouragement

Rock Group leadership is one of the most significant ministries within TRBC.

You are helping people:

- Follow Jesus
- Build biblical community
- Discover their purpose
- Serve others
- Reach the lost

Remain faithful.

Love people well.

Depend on the Holy Spirit.

Trust God to work through your leadership for His glory and the growth of His church.

DISCUSSION GUIDES & WORKSHEETS

SESSION ONE WORKSHEET

The Purpose and Mission of Rock Groups

Discussion Questions

- Which of the five reasons for Rock Groups stands out most to you? Why?
- How have small groups impacted your own spiritual journey?
- What does it mean for TRBC to be a church "of" small groups rather than simply a church "with" small groups?
- Which part of the church's vision resonates most deeply with you?
- What opportunities do you see for your group to contribute to the mission of TRBC?

Personal Reflection

What excites you most about leading a Rock Group?

What concerns or challenges do you anticipate?

Action Step

Identify one area where you want to grow as a leader this year.

SESSION TWO WORKSHEET

Welcome & Worship

Discussion Questions

- Think about a time when you felt genuinely welcomed. What made that experience meaningful?
- Why is trust essential for spiritual growth?

- Which “one another” command do you believe is most needed in groups today?
- What barriers prevent authentic community from developing?
- How can worship become more participatory in a small-group setting?

Community Assessment

Rate your current group's strength in these areas:

Area	Strong	Growing	Needs Attention
Hospitality	☐	☐	☐
Prayer	☐	☐	☐
Vulnerability	☐	☐	☐
Encouragement	☐	☐	☐
Follow-Up Care	☐	☐	☐

Action Plan

List three practical ways you can strengthen community in your group.

SESSION THREE WORKSHEET

Work & Witness

Discussion Questions

- Why do many groups naturally drift inward rather than outward?
- What fears often prevent believers from sharing their faith?
- How does serving together strengthen relationships?
- What needs exist in your community that your group could address?
- What role should prayer play in evangelism?

Outreach Brainstorm

List people who need prayer and gospel influence.

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Prayer Need: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Prayer Need: _____

Name: _____

Relationship: _____

Prayer Need: _____

Service Project Planning

Potential Ministry Opportunity:

Date:

Leader:

Desired Outcome:

SESSION FOUR WORKSHEET

The Word

Observation Exercise

Read a selected Bible passage.

What do you notice?

Who is speaking?

Who is the audience?

Interpretation Exercise

What is the main idea of the passage?

What does this teach about God?

Application Exercise

Based on this passage:

I need to START:

I need to STOP:

I need to CONTINUE:

Discussion Evaluation

After leading a Bible discussion, evaluate:

- ☐ I encouraged participation.
 - ☐ I stayed focused on Scripture.
 - ☐ I asked open-ended questions.
 - ☐ I moved toward application.
 - ☐ I allowed others to discover truth.
-

SESSION FIVE WORKSHEET

Essential Leadership Skills

Question Development Exercise

Convert the following into open-ended questions.

Example:

Did David trust God?

Becomes:

How did David demonstrate trust in God?

Practice:

Question 1:

Open-Ended Version:

Question 2:

Open-Ended Version:

Leadership Reflection

Which type of participant is most challenging for you?

☐ Over-Talker

☐ Non-Talker

☐ Rabbit Chaser

☐ Hobby Horse Rider

☐ Insensitive Person

Why?

Safe Environment Checklist

Before each meeting:

- ☐ Pray for members.
 - ☐ Prepare discussion questions.
 - ☐ Review follow-up needs.
 - ☐ Create a welcoming atmosphere.
 - ☐ Protect confidentiality.
 - ☐ Plan time for prayer.
-

SESSION SIX WORKSHEET

Apprentice Development

Identifying Future Leaders

List potential apprentices.

Candidate #1

Name:

F.A.I.T.H. Strengths:

Growth Areas:

Candidate #2

Name:

F.A.I.T.H. Strengths:

Growth Areas:

Apprentice Development Plan

Current Stage:

☐ I Do, You Watch

☐ I Do, You Help

☐ You Do, I Help

☐ You Do, I Watch

Next Leadership Opportunity:

Date:

Multiplication Planning

Potential New Group Launch Date:

Potential Leader:

Potential Host:

Potential Members:

LEADER COMMITMENT PAGE

As a Rock Group Leader, I commit to:

☐ Pursue a growing relationship with Jesus Christ.

☐ Pray regularly for my group members.

☐ Prepare faithfully for group gatherings.

- ☐ Lead with humility and integrity.
- ☐ Protect confidentiality and trust.
- ☐ Serve as a disciple-maker.
- ☐ Develop future leaders.
- ☐ Support the mission and values of TRBC.

Leader Name:

Signature:

Date:

RETREAT REFLECTION

What has God taught me during this training?

What is my biggest leadership takeaway?

What is one step of obedience I will take immediately?

APPENDIX A

Recommended Resources for Rock Group Leaders

Bible Study Resources

Study Bibles

- ESV Study Bible
- CSB Study Bible
- NKJV Study Bible
- MacArthur Study Bible

Online Bible Study Tools

- Blue Letter Bible
- Bible Study Tools
- Bible Gateway
- Got Questions
- Logos Bible Software

Bible Reading Plans

- The Discipleship Journal Reading Plan
 - The Bible Recap
 - Foundations 260 Reading Plan
 - M'Cheyne Bible Reading Plan
-

Leadership Development Resources

Books on Small Group Leadership

Leading Healthy, Growing, Multiplying Small Groups

Rod Dempsey & Dave Earley

Practical guidance for creating transformational group experiences.

Community

Brad House

A biblical theology and practical guide for small group ministry.

Building a Discipling Culture

Mike Breen

A framework for developing disciples who make disciples.

The Trellis and the Vine

Colin Marshall & Tony Payne

A helpful model for multiplying leaders and ministries.

Spiritual Leadership

J. Oswald Sanders

Timeless principles for Christian leadership.

Evangelism Resources

Recommended Books

- Evangelism by J. Mack Stiles
- Becoming a Contagious Christian by Hybels & Mittelberg
- Questioning Evangelism by Randy Newman

Gospel Presentation Tools

- The Three Circles
 - Romans Road
 - Bridge Illustration
 - One-Verse Evangelism
-

Prayer Resources

Books

- A Praying Life – Paul Miller
- Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire – Jim Cymbala
- Prayer – Timothy Keller

Prayer Practices

- Prayer Partners
 - Prayer Walks
 - Prayer Journals
 - Weekly Prayer Updates
-

APPENDIX B

Rock Group Leader Self-Assessment

Rate yourself from 1–5.

1 = Rarely True

5 = Consistently True

Spiritual Health

Assessment	Score
I spend regular time in prayer.	_____
I consistently read and apply Scripture.	_____
I maintain integrity in my personal life.	_____
I depend on the Holy Spirit for leadership.	_____
I actively pursue spiritual growth.	_____
Spiritual Health Total: _____ / 25	

Leadership Effectiveness

Assessment	Score
I prepare adequately for meetings.	_____
I ask engaging discussion questions.	_____
I listen well to others.	_____
I manage discussions effectively.	_____
I create a welcoming atmosphere.	_____
Leadership Total: _____ / 25	

Shepherding

Assessment	Score
I regularly pray for group members.	_____

Assessment	Score
I follow up between meetings.	_____
I know members' needs and challenges.	_____
I encourage struggling members.	_____
I help members grow spiritually.	_____
Shepherding Total: _____ / 25	

Mission and Multiplication

Assessment	Score
Our group has an outward focus.	_____
We regularly pray for unbelievers.	_____
We engage in service projects.	_____
I identify future leaders.	_____
I am developing an apprentice.	_____

Mission Total: _____ / 25

Overall Score: _____ / 100

Reflection Questions

What is my greatest strength as a leader?

What area needs the most improvement?

What is one action step for the next 90 days?

APPENDIX C

F.A.I.T.H. Apprentice Evaluation Tool

Use this assessment when considering potential apprentices.

Characteristic	1	2	3	4	5
Faithful	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Available	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Initiative	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Teachable	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Honest	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Candidate Name

Observed Strengths

Areas for Growth

Recommended Next Step

- ☐ Continue Observation
 - ☐ Begin Apprenticeship
 - ☐ Assign Leadership Responsibilities
 - ☐ Prepare for Group Multiplication
-

APPENDIX D

Sample Rock Group Covenant

As members of this Rock Group, we commit to:

Spiritual Growth

We will pursue Christ together through prayer, Scripture, worship, and obedience.

Participation

We will prioritize consistent attendance and engagement.

Confidentiality

We will protect personal information shared within the group.

Encouragement

We will build one another up with grace and truth.

Service

We will serve one another and our community.

Outreach

We will pray for and pursue people who need Christ.

Multiplication

We will help develop future leaders and support new groups.

Member Signature:

Date:

APPENDIX E

Sample Weekly Rock Group Meeting Guide

Welcome (15 Minutes)

- Fellowship
- Icebreaker
- Check-in

Worship (10 Minutes)

- Prayer
- Testimonies
- Scripture Reading
- Worship Music

Word (30–40 Minutes)

- Observation

- Interpretation
- Application

Work (10 Minutes)

- Care Needs
- Ministry Opportunities
- Service Planning

Witness (10 Minutes)

- Pray for Lost Friends
- Outreach Planning
- Invitations

Closing Prayer (10 Minutes)

Total Time: Approximately 75–90 Minutes

APPENDIX F

Annual Leader Development Plan

Quarter 1

Spiritual Health Assessment

Goals:

Quarter 2

Leadership Skill Development

Goals:

Quarter 3

Outreach and Ministry Expansion

Goals:

Quarter 4

Apprentice Development and Multiplication

Goals:

End-of-Year Reflection

What fruit have I seen this year?

How has God grown me as a leader?

Who am I investing in for future leadership?

What are my goals for next year?

June 18, 2026

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The following article is located at: <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2016/become-transformational-leader.html>

SmallGroups.com, February, 2016

ARTICLE

Become a Transformational Leader

Seven tips that allow leaders to influence their groups in powerful ways.

Dr. Bill Donahue | posted February 29, 2016



It takes a changing life to change a life. —Joe Stowell

What does it take to be a life-changing group leader—one who experiences transformation and also catalyzes life change in others? Are there patterns, habits or practices to be embraced?

The goal of a transformational leader is a changed community of people. Most of us are familiar with this powerful passage in Acts 2:42–47:

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. 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, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.

While it's tempting to view this passage as a specific strategy for leading groups, the more important takeaway is that these people clearly had been changed by God. They were acting differently toward one another and the world around them. That's the ultimate goal: a changed, loving, engaged, truthful, humble, powerful, and mission-minded community.

The Leader's Challenge: Self-Leadership

Becoming an Acts 2 community requires Acts 20 leadership. Acts 2 is stimulating; Acts 20 is sobering. Consider this charge: "Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which he bought with his own blood" (Acts 20:28, emphasis added). Watch over the flock—and watch over yourself!

Paul gave Timothy, who led the church in Ephesus, clear instructions to be this kind of leader. Timothy was a young emerging leader, and he faced overwhelming obstacles in a heresy-filled city and spiritually-confused church. On top of that, Timothy had a lot of self-doubt and far too few ministry resources.

Like many women and men in ministry, Timothy found himself pressed from every side. He needed to take care of himself if he was going to face the opposition without growing weary. So Paul wrote to him to encourage him to focus on the right things. To become Acts 20 leaders, we must focus on the same seven things Paul offered to Timothy:

1. Connect with Christ

1 Timothy 6:11

Paul wanted his protégé Timothy to move from being a timid teacher to a passionate leader pursuing Jesus fully. He called him to run from everything that would sidetrack him—envy, strife, malicious talk, endless controversies, and the temptation to do ministry for financial gain. Instead, he was to “pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.” In other words, to pursue Christlikeness.

When I was a young Christian, one of my mentors impressed upon me the necessity to connect daily with Jesus. Specifically, he encouraged me to read from the Gospels each day. He believed that seeing Jesus teaching, performing miracles, loving people, and resisting the attacks of his enemies, brings us into closer connection with Christ.

2. Guard Your Heart

1 Timothy 4:12

Proverbs 4:23 reminds us to, “Guard your heart for it is the wellspring of life.” Character is formed and shaped in the heart. Protecting the heart assures that it remains soft, open, malleable, and devoted to the things of Christ. A transformational leader knows that a wounded, hardened, or neglected heart is the breeding ground for unresolved anger, complacency, and indifference.

Leaders who won’t reveal their heart to their group and God lead only at 50 percent capacity. Without an open heart, their leadership may be strategic and practical, but never soul-filled and transformational.

You grow your heart when you open your heart to God and others, when relationships are real, and when courageous people offer the deepest parts of themselves to others.

3. Confirm Your Calling

2 Timothy 1:6–9

You have been challenged to tend to a little flock—and sometimes that’s really difficult. Leading a flock will require late-night phone calls and early morning prayers. Group members will disappoint us, and we’ll disappoint ourselves. To combat this, our motives for ministry must be pure, and our convictions clear.

When I was a youth pastor, I decided to visit Tim and Audrey who lived on a small farm not far from our church. But they were away with their mother for a few hours. Their dad was home, though, and asked me to help him around the farm until they returned. Growing up in a red brick row home in the city of Philadelphia, I knew nothing about helping on the farm, so I said “no thanks” to baling hay and milking. When he asked me to call in the sheep, though, I was excited.

“What do I say?” I asked. With a sly smile he replied, “I just say, ‘Hey sheep! Come on in!’”

“Hey sheep!” I started, but he interrupted.

“Not so soft. It’s windy and they’re far away. You have to really let it rip, preacher boy!”

I took a deep breath and with the loudest voice I could muster blared, “Hey sheep! C’mon in!”

The sheep never budged, and he burst out laughing. “Watch this,” he said. In his everyday neighborly tone, he simply spoke, “Hey sheep, c’mon in.” The sheep turned on a dime and headed toward us.

“You ever read the Bible at that seminary?” he asked. “Remember where it says, ‘My sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me?’” I sheepishly nodded. “Don’t forget you are the shepherd to my kids and when you call them, I hope they recognize your voice.”

That day, I knew I had a call—not a job, not something I did to get ready for real ministry someday with adults, but a real ministry call. I was given a little flock to lead, and until God said move on, I was the one to guide them to Christ.

4. Honor Your Calling

2 Timothy 4:5

Some of us are great leaders, but we don't produce the results we expect. Maybe you're frustrated because you know you have leadership gifts and abilities, but something seems to be wrong.

Often this means that we're simply leading in the wrong place or leading the wrong people. Perhaps you're leading adults when you should be guiding children, or you're focused on leading a couples small group when you should be leading a task-focused ministry team.

Paul told Timothy to fulfill his own ministry—not anyone else's. The same is true for you. Make every effort to determine where and how you should be using your gifts. You might have to take an assessment or ask close friends and ministry partners to truthfully assess your abilities. Whatever it takes, please do this. The church suffers when its leaders are improperly deployed in the wrong places. Find the place where your gifts and abilities are compatible with needs, and throw yourself fully into that ministry.

5. Develop Your Competence

2 Timothy 2:15

The former CEO of Harley-Davidson motorcycle, Richard Teerlink, once said, "If you empower dummies, you get dumb decisions faster!" Heart and passion are not sufficient for capable leaders to perform their duties, and empowering untrained people is not an effective strategy.

Timothy needed to develop his leadership skills. The same is true for small-group leaders. We can't afford to be lax when it comes to shepherding people, leading discussions, and guiding prayer. We must avail ourselves to training, committing ourselves to developing our skills, so we can lead well.

6. Maintain Your Commitment

2 Timothy 4:2

Commitment is treated like a four-letter word in our culture. But Timothy was challenged to stay in the game whether it was "in season" or "out of season," easy or hard, convenient or inconvenient. Leaders can only call others to finish the race when they themselves are running hard all the way to the tape.

Frank, a staff member at our church, modeled this perfectly. Once, Frank called a young couple who was leading and serving in our church to check in with them. When they got talking, he learned that though they'd been looking forward to a much-needed date that night, the babysitter for their young children had just canceled. Without hesitating, Frank rearranged his schedule and took care of their children that night.

Do you think they see Frank as a leader? Do you think they respect him? You better believe it! Their hearts were encouraged and their lives were changed by his simple commitment to their needs. That is what life-changing leaders do.

7. Recognize Your Capacity

1 Timothy 4:16

There's one thing that can derail your leadership—even if you've focused on the six things above. Leading a group is a wearisome obligation, and you can quickly burn out if you're not mindful.

Unfortunately, I see leader after leader running on empty because they have not paid attention to themselves. Self-care is the first job of a leader. And that requires a few things. First, be aware of your limits. You can't do it all! Know what you do well, and say no to the

other things in your life. As Jim Collins coaches, “You cannot add to your ‘Start’ list unless you have a ‘Stop’ list.” Decide what you can and cannot do, and stick to it!

Look at your emotional, physical, and spiritual gauges. Are they Full? Empty? Do what you need to do to replenish your energy, care for your soul, and mind your relationship with God. Do the transformational work on yourself in the power of the Spirit, and you will be able to better guide the transformational growth of others.

Your Changed Life with Change Other Lives

These seven areas will help you take an honest look at yourself as a leader so you can be an authentic, transformational force for change in others. Your weaknesses, fears, and insecurities are fertile ground for God to begin his transforming work. But it will take some focus and energy. Are you up for the challenge? If so, join biblical leaders like Moses, Deborah, Joshua, Lydia, Peter, Priscilla, James, and Phoebe. They, like us, started with a simple willingness to be changed, and God used them to change others.

—Dr. Bill Donahue is a Group Life Consultant, Leadership Coach, and Professor at Trinity International University. You can find more at drbilldonahue.com.

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The following article is located at: <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2003/maintaining-spiritual-focus.html>

SmallGroups.com, March, 2003

ARTICLE

Maintaining Spiritual Focus

Are you leading to a place you have been?

Rick Lowry | posted March 12, 2003

Small group leadership in the local church is a detail-intensive ministry. Lesson preparation and regular contact with group members are hard enough to squeeze into a busy leader's calendar. Add to these the scheduling of hosts and refreshments, information updates and attendance at training sessions, and it becomes one of the most demanding ministries in the church.

With all these elements to keep up with, it is easy to lose a spiritual focus. Whether we are a leader of one small group or lead the leaders of groups, administration can overshadow our true goal of discipleship. Here are some ways that I, as a small group leader, maintain a spiritual focus.

GROWTH ATMOSPHERE. A small group leader can provide a positive atmosphere for spiritual growth. Above all else, my goal as a small group leader is the spiritual success of the individuals God has placed under my spiritual care. I am willing to do whatever it takes for the members to find God's will for their lives and to help them move in an upward direction. As their shepherd, I am coming to God on my knees and saying, "God, please give me insight into each person's life in my group, so I can determine what exactly they need in order to move to the next spiritual level."

BIBLICAL FOUNDATION. Spiritual leadership means making the Bible the foundation of group life. We rightly think of small groups as a tremendous relational opportunity. But as vital as relationship building is in small groups, the Word of God is still the foundation. It should be obvious to any visitor to our group meeting, any random week, that the Bible is essential to us.

PERSONAL HOLINESS. The most important thing I can do to lead my flock spiritually is to be spiritual myself. I cannot lead people to a place I have not been (or maybe even am not willing to go).

My daily prayer is "Lord, how closely am I walking with you?" I have developed ten questions to ask myself on a regular basis in order to make sure I am knowing God more and more deeply:

Holiness: Am I progressively moving away from sin?

God's Word: Is God's Word food to me, and am I spending time in it?

Worship: Am I worshipping regularly, both privately and corporately?

Sharing Faith: Am I sharing my faith regularly?

Stretching faith: Am I stretching my faith regularly, stepping out of my comfort zone to a place where I depend on God?

Prayer: Am I daily talking and listening to God in prayer?

Solitude: Have I been alone with God enough to hear his voice clearly?

Serving: Am I serving with the abilities God has given me?

Spiritual progress: Am I further along in my relationship with God than I was a year ago?

Accountability: Have I made myself accountable to another trustworthy brother or sister for my spiritual maintenance and growth?

If I can answer "yes" to those ten, I can be fairly sure that I am putting myself in a place to know God more deeply with every year that passes. I can be confident that God can use my leadership to implant spiritual growth in my group members.

I have been to groups where people seem afraid to talk about spiritual things. Most people won't automatically gravitate toward spiritual concerns in a group discussion. They look to the leader to open the spiritual door and invite them in.

INTIMATE KNOWLEDGE. A spiritual leader knows his or her group members well. This takes time, building trust and expressing interest.

This knowledge begins with the little things. Do I have the birthdays of the people in my group on my calendar? Can I name their children? Do I know their struggles? Do I know how they best connect? Are they a studier? Are they a person for whom relationships are important? Are they oriented more toward feeling or thinking?

Jesus modeled a depth of care as He who "lays down his life for the sheep." When was the last time I made a sacrifice to see my group members grow in Christ...a sacrifice of time perhaps, doing a little extra preparation to give this week's lesson a creative edge? Or a sacrifice of energy to get them involved in a service project. A good leader knows the group members and chooses activities based on their spiritual needs.

VALLEY WALKING. A good leader walks with group members in their spiritual valleys. Romans twelve encourages us to "Rejoice with those who rejoice, and mourn with those who mourn." That implies a level of intimacy. It means we have taken the time to enter into the joys and pains of the life of another person, which is a vulnerable and risky business.

One evening our phone rang at midnight. On the other end was the husband of a couple in our small group. He said, "OK, you are our friend: we are about to hurt each other. Can you come over and mediate?" As I drove over, I remember having no idea what to do. Prayer seemed appropriate! So, I did lots of praying. When I got there, I put them in separate rooms and talked each one through the intensity of the moment. It worked. They calmed down, and an hour later, I left.

Why did they call me during such an intimate argument? Because of the relationship we had built. They knew I loved them unconditionally, and they trusted me with their spiritual lives. If I am truly spiritually shepherding the people in my group, I should regularly receive calls in the middle of the night when they are walking through the valley of family heartaches, death, depression, or loneliness.

A member experiencing a spiritual valley sometimes will shy away from the group he or she previously enjoyed fellowship with. A wise group leader will perceive when a member is experiencing shame or guilt. That leader will go to them, offer assurance, and even help heal relationships between them and members of the group that may be strained. "Blessed are the peacemakers." In Jesus' story from Luke 15, the shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one wanders off. He leaves the other ninety-nine and searches for that sheep until he finds it. That's the kind of shepherding that takes place in the valley.

GRACE MOTIVATED. Small group leaders are spiritual shepherds. Some people look at sheep and see dirt, smell manure, and perceive some of the dumbest animals God made. Others look at sheep and see gentle companions, valuable for their wool, and submissive in spirit.

How do I see the people under my care in this small group? Do I think of them as an imposition, interrupting my schedule, or am I available to them because I see the potential in every single one of them to reach God's design for their lives?

PRAYER AND DEPENDENCE. I will never experience any spiritual success if I attempt to lead my small group by my own power and wisdom. I must depend on God. I must pray daily and fervently for God to do his work among my group members. As I lead, I keep my eyes on Jesus. He went to the trouble of purchasing His people with His own blood. He will not refuse wisdom to those of us He has called to aid in the spiritual formation of his redeemed.

ARTICLE

God's Sixteen Guidelines For Building Great Community

Biblical guidelines for creating community.

Dave Earley | posted February 12, 2004

As a pastor of a small groups church, I have visited various groups through the years. I have found that one can often quickly predict much about the future of the group within the first few minutes.

There are groups where people obviously enjoy each other's company. They rapidly flow from laughing to crying together. They respect one another. Group members share more than surface situations and short shallow answers to probing questions. The facades have been cracked, the inner person has been exposed, and transparency is expressed. They are experiencing something wonderful called, "community".

There are also groups where the opposite is true. People come in guarded and stiff. Walls are still in place. Defenses are set. Disclosures are guarded. Polite smiles never give way to outbursts of laughter. Tears are held in check. People leave carrying the same burdens they walked in carrying. Something is missing. This group has yet to experience community.

Community is coming to the point where, as a group, we share our stories, thoughts, opinions, struggles, and victories with each other. We begin to share life together. We are experiencing real, Biblical fellowship or koinonia. We are participating in life with others to the point of knowing them, feeling their hurts, sharing their ups and downs, and encouraging their hearts.

God has already told us how to develop community. He actually commands us to do so by fulfilling sixteen "one another" commands in the New Testament. They are God's guaranteed guidelines for growing great community.

1. **Move beyond your comfort zone to affectionately greet one another. (Romans 16:16; 1 Cor. 16:20; 2 Cor. 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14)**

Never underestimate the power of touch. As social beings we need touch to be healthy. We live in a high tech, low touch world. One major reason people get involved in a group is that they want a safe, high touch environment. Learn to use the time as members arrive, and/or after they have all arrived, to greet one another with an appropriate touch. In some cultures this would be shaking hands. In other cultures it is a hug. In still others, it is a kiss.

We often give out a few handshakes and hugs before we get started. As touch goes up, defenses come down. As touch increases, receptivity increases.

2. **Hold each other in high esteem and actively honor one another. (Romans 12:16)**

Nothing builds community more than the atmosphere of esteem and honor. When a group breathes such an atmosphere, meaningful authentic relational community will grow and blossom.

3. **Make the effort to resolve conflict in order to live in genuine harmony with each other. (Romans 12:16)**

No two people are alike. Therefore, it is just a matter of time until one of my differences rubs one of you the wrong way. Conflict is the result. To try to deny or avoid conflict is to kill true community. To resolve it builds community.

4. **Don't look at each other through the lens of criticism or self-righteousness. (Romans 14:13)**
When people sense a spirit of criticism or judgment, they either close down or begin to find fault. A spirit of criticism will suck the life out of community.
5. **Treat each other with a sense of acceptance. Give others the freedom to be themselves. Realize that no one is perfect. (Romans 15:7)**
The opposite of the spirit of criticism is the spirit of acceptance. When a group lives in a climate of acceptance, biblical community grows like plants in a hothouse.
6. **Create a climate of teaching and teach-ability where members can share what they learn with each other. (Romans 15:14)**
The attitude of being mutual learners on a journey together builds camaraderie. Camaraderie creates community, and people feel closer to one another when they sense they are on their spiritual journeys together.
7. **When a need is shared, make the effort to meet it. (Gal 5:13)**
I was in a group one evening where the leader asked about the whereabouts of an absent member. Someone noted that they were home sick. The group immediately planned to visit them the next evening. One person even volunteered to bring a meal. That was a group living community.

In another group, a single mom shared a financial need. After she left, the group members remaining collected over a hundred dollars to meet her need. The leader and apprentice met after work the next night to drop the gift by her home. She never missed group again. Instead of referring to "the" group, she now refers to it as "my" group.
8. **Sing together. (Eph. 5:19)**
Currently, my family leads a group of high school students, mostly boys. The week before Christmas, we gathered around the piano to sing Christmas carols. I thought the girls would like it and the boys would groan. I was wrong! My wife could hardly play as seven or eight broad shouldered, varsity-jacket wearing, side-burned, high school boys crowded around singing at the top of their lungs. It wasn't pretty music (although it really wasn't that bad), but the community was warm and beautiful.
9. **Realize that everyone goes through seasons that are so challenging that they make the person more difficult to enjoy. Bear with them and forgive them. (Eph 4:32)**
10. **Don't try to win every argument or always be right. Submit to one another. (Eph. 5:21)**
11. **Encouragement is oxygen to the soul. Encourage one another. (1 Th. 5:11; Heb 3:13; 10:25)**
12. **Motivate one another. (Heb 10:24)**
13. **Refuse to ever slander someone in or outside the group. Nothing will shut down community more quickly than slander. (James 4:11)**
14. **Don't let hospitality be the job of just one person or couple. Take turns showing hospitality to one another. (1 Pet. 4:9)**
15. **It's not all about you. Clothe yourself in a servant's apron of humility. (1 Peter 5:5)**
16. **Sin dulls light and destroys fellowship. Deal with it. (1 John 1:7)**

God created us for community and knows what helps us get there. Follow His guidelines and watch Him grow true connectedness in your group.

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The following article is located at: <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2012/creating-community-of-care.html>

SmallGroups.com, June, 2012

ARTICLE

Creating a Community of Care

Five tips for a more caring small group

Jay Firebaugh | posted June 4, 2012



My good friend and mentor Jim Egli has this to say in *Small Groups, Big Impact*: "People want to join groups where there is a strong level of care. That is, when group members really care about each other, when they pray for one another, eat together, and have fun together, taking time with one another in between their meetings, new people want to be part of the group. Groups with a high level of care effectively assimilate others into group life."

Leaders tend to focus only on the meeting, but the meeting is probably only about 25 percent of what really matters in making your group successful. Yes, if your meeting is disorganized and boring, that won't help create a healthy group. But for the most part, you can have average meetings and still have a mega-successful group if you create a community of care. And that's the 75 percent you need to most focus on as a leader. Here are some tips to get you started.

1. *Genuinely care about your group members.* Regularly think about them and what's going on in their lives. Make them part of your ongoing thoughts and not just something you think about on Tuesday nights.
2. *Pray for your group members.* Jim's research has shown that the most significant thing a small-group leader can do to help group success is to pray daily for the people in the group. Not technique, flare, giftedness, or style—just forming the habit of daily prayer for each group member.
3. *Cultivate a climate where people can share authentically about their lives.* If the conversation is only superficial or sticks solely to Bible facts, then it's hard to really care about each other. It's quite a different matter when you begin to intertwine your hearts as you truly get to know each other. When that occurs, care happens naturally. Help set a caring climate by being open and honest in your own sharing. This will encourage everyone else in your group to do the same.
4. *Do things together beyond the meeting night. Sit together at church.* Go out to dinner. Watch the big game. Help each other out. Serve as a group. Spending informal time together will help deepen your friendships.
5. *Work at creating cross-care.* Leaders always set the pace by modeling, and when the people in the group start caring for each other, you'll know you've got genuine community. You can't do all the caring, and it means more to have the care from someone else in the group, too, so help your group members minister to and pray for one another. You'll know you're really there when you start finding out about things second and third hand!

It's not rocket science. Invest in doing the things that will make your small group a caring community. Watch your relationships grow deeper and your impact grow wider.

—Jay Firebaugh is the Director of Small Groups at New Life Church in Gahanna, Ohio. You can check out practical tools for pastors and small-group leaders on his [All About Small Groups](#) Facebook page. Used with permission from the author.

ARTICLE

Biblical Principles for Pastoral Care in Small Groups

When leaders understand what is and is not expected of them, they are more at ease.

Brian Pierce | posted July 12, 2006

Sarah was facing her biggest nightmare. She had resisted leading a small group for years because she lacked confidence in her ability to give wise counsel to the problems of others. Her pastor had finally convinced her that she did not need to worry. "It rarely happens", he told her. She has been an excellent leader, and her group has grown closer. Lately, however, group members have become more open and are turning to her to solve their problems. She has spent hours on the phone with several members of the group. After one late night "crisis" conversation, she slept through her alarm, missed an important meeting, and was reprimanded at work. She felt deceived and abandoned by her pastor. He had not prepared her for this. Feeling inadequate and overwhelmed, she felt her only way out was to resign as a leader and to leave the group. How did this happen? What went wrong? What did she do to get into this mess? What could have been done to prevent her sense of impending doom and failure?

Several things were missing or minimized in Sarah's preparation to become a small group leader.

No one told her what was expected of her in providing care for her group members and in helping them with their problems.

No one had given her a basis or trained her in the "how-tos" of helping others.

She did not know how to set healthy boundaries for herself.

She had never seen a leader model pastoral care in a small group.

It does not take long to learn that the fear of handling basic pastoral care for group members is one of the biggest barriers to recruiting and retaining small group leaders. Therefore, it is important to help both the novice and experienced leader understand their role in providing pastoral care in their group. Over many years, and from a variety of sources, (many of them forgotten now), I have found the following information helpful in both calming and arming leaders to appropriately meet the care needs of their group members.

In addition, I make it a practice to give each leader a copy of The Billy Graham Christian Worker's Handbook (Billy Graham Evangelistic Association) upon completion of their initial training. I call it a graduation gift. I feel the content, format, and diversity of this resource makes it more user-friendly and applicable to small group pastoral care needs and situations than other resources I have used in the past.

Here is what leaders need to be prepared to meet the basic pastoral care needs of their group members.

First, they need to know their role is to bear burdens...not to carry loads.

"Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you may also be tempted. Carry each other's burdens (baros) and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself. Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself without comparing himself to somebody else. For each one should carry his own load (phortion)." Galatians 6:1-5

If we understand the "law of Christ" referring to our call to

"love one another as I (Christ) have loved you", then we need to see the distinction between the Greek word for "burden" (baros) and "load" (phortion) used in the New International Version.

This passage tells us that we are to bear one another's burdens (sufferings). That is, we should come alongside and support a person emotionally. We can do this by listening to, encouraging, and praying with people who are experiencing pain or testing.

However, this same passage indicates that each person is responsible for carrying his or her own load of problems. When we take responsibility for another's problems, we do it at the expense of their self-respect, their self-esteem, and their sense of self-responsibility.

(Edited excerpt from: Learning to Care — Small Groups As A Path To Community, Richard Peace & Thom Corrigan - Pilgrimage Training Group — Littleton, Colorado - p.70)

Next, with this knowledge, they should be helped to see their responsibility for pastoral care is limited to the members of their group but not for them.

They are responsible to:

- Love (John 13:34)
- Be devoted to and honor (Romans 12:10)
- Live in harmony with (Romans 12:16)
- Serve (Galatians 5:13)
- Submit to (Ephesians 5:21)
- Bear with and forgive (Colossians 3:13)

They are not responsible for:

- Making people happy
- Fixing people's problems
- The way a person responds or behaves

(Edited excerpt from: Learning To Care: Small Groups As A Path To Community - Richard Peace & Thom Corrigan - Pilgrimage Training Group — Littleton, Colorado - p.24)

Finally, they need to recognize the ultimate goal of their care giving and a process for overcoming the obstacles to achieving their goals.

- 1. The ultimate goal of their care giving is to bring men and women to Christ-likeness. (Romans 8:29)**

Healing is the result of seeking the Lord. It is not the goal. In some cases, healing is impeded by those who want to get a quick fix.

The goal is to help their members think and to do what the Lord wants. This opens them up for God's power to make the necessary changes (Romans 2:4) and hastens Christ's healing.

In some cases, leaders may need to realize that the persons' struggle may never be eliminated while on this earth. This thorn in the flesh needs to be given to God for "His grace is sufficient." (2 Corinthians 12:7-9)

2. The cause of all emotional problems is the substitution of a self-generated solution for the sufficiency of Christ.

Everyone has the need for: (1) Relationship (love); (2) Importance (a reason to live)

However, no one and nothing except Christ can meet that need (Colossians 1:27). Therefore, our substitutions for Christ (human love, achievement, etc.) are what produce our problems (Isaiah 53:6). While victims of abuse or dysfunction have been violated, they must see that their response to the abuse is their biggest obstacle to freedom.

3. The most normal human response to life's problems and struggles is the avoidance of pain.

Until people (victims and strugglers) are willing to face the pain of victimization, neglect, and poor choices, their problems will remain.

People need to accept the biblical principle that entering into death (facing and dealing with their pain and sin) will eventually lead to life (John 12:24).

Willful avoidance of pain (either the problem itself or the result of a "substitute" solution) must be confessed as sin (1 John 1:8; Matthew 25:24-26).

4. The Holy Spirit is the only source and provider of lasting change. As His helpers, we are totally dependent upon His grace, wisdom, and strength. (John 14:16-17)

The caregiver needs God's wisdom (James 1:5) and must cover in prayer all efforts to help. While it is wise to pray with the person in need, caregivers should also pray for themselves.

Some problems are spiritual in nature and will require authoritative prayer.

Sometimes the best answer to a person's need is to direct them to a biblically-based support or recovery group. If no group dealing with their issue exists, it may be appropriate to help get a group started.

5. Restoration is a process of renewing the mind. (Romans 12:2) The Scriptures and biblical principles must be consistently ingested. (John 8:32)

In most cases, since there is a distorted image of God, helpers should "re-explain" the true God.

As helpers, we should model (this principle and all others) by asking the Lord for His thoughts and by applying His word.

6. Every person needs a supportive group. (Galatians 6:2)

Care giving is best provided through multiple relationships (a group) rather than one-on-one relationships.

In some cases, we may need to help someone find or start a group to help deal with unique or specific needs.

7. Some issues go beyond what is expected of a leader and their abilities to provide pastoral care in a small group. People dealing with these issues should be referred to the care of a specialist.

Small group leaders should feel free to direct group members to trained pastors in their church.

Churches can provide small group leaders with a list of Christian counselors approved for referrals.

When leaders understand what is and is not expected of them, they are more at ease. They can communicate early and clearly to group members what level of pastoral care they are able and willing to provide. Properly prepared leaders are able to set limits and supply care at a level in which they feel comfortable and capable of providing. In addition, appropriate supervision and ongoing training will prolong a leader's ministry and extend the church's potential for pastoral care.

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The following article is located at: <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2008/how-to-pray-for-your-small-group.html>

SmallGroups.com, April, 2008

ARTICLE

How to Pray for Your Small Group

Here are 10 tips to increase the frequency and effectiveness of your supplications.

Dave Earley and Rod Dempsey | posted April 23, 2008

Many years ago, evangelist S. D. Gordon said, "The greatest thing anyone can do for God and man is to pray." After 25 years of leading small groups and coaching small-group leaders, I have come to one clear conviction: prayer is the most important activity of a small-group leader. In fact, if a group leader could only do one thing to make his or her group more effective, that one thing would be to pray.

Prayer is a fascinating tool for the person with a heart to minister to others. It is one of the simplest things we can do. All we need to do is sit down and lift someone up to the attention of God. Yet most of us will admit that prayer is one of the hardest things to do for others. We get busy. We get distracted. We get discouraged, and we just don't pray enough.

Highly effective small-group leaders view prayer as a non-negotiable aid in their ministry to others. They use it often and well. They build it into their daily schedules and make it a high priority. They don't just pray a little; they pray a lot.

Here are some tips to help you effectively pray for your small group.

1. **Have a set time, and a set amount of time, for prayer.** Those who don't have a set time for prayer rarely take the time to pray. Great people of prayer speak of their appointments with God. Most agree that the "when" of the time is not as important as actually having a time. So set aside a time when you will meet with God daily. Make it your unbreakable appointment with God.

It's also good to set a goal for the amount of time you will spend in prayer. A beginner may start with 10 to 15 minutes and grow from there. An hour in prayer would be a great goal to reach. If that seems like a lot, realize that the more we pray, the more God will work. The small-group leaders making the greatest impact are the leaders spending time in prayer.

2. **Have a usual place for prayer.** Our ability to focus and concentrate in prayer is enhanced by having a regular, private place for prayer. Jesus spoke of this private place in Matthew 6:5-7. He promised that the God who sees in secret will reward us openly by answering our prayers. Find a place where you can privately and passionately pour your heart out to God.

When my children were little, we lived in a very small house. I found that the best place for me to pray was the sidewalk of my neighborhood as I walked for exercise every morning. Now I pray in my office or as I walk on a nearby track in the mornings. I often go to a park and sit on a picnic table and pray. Again, where you pray is not important, but it's vital to find a "place" to pray.

3. **Have a plan for prayer.** Many great prayer warriors speak of using the disciple's prayer of Matthew 6:9-13 as a plan for prayer. They use it as an outline that includes worship (v. 9), petition (v. 10-11), and confession (v. 12). They cover these areas once or even several times when they pray.

Others use the acronym ACTS—Adoration, Confession, Thanksgiving, and Supplication—as their prayer plan. But the specifics of the plan do not matter as much as having a plan in place.

4. **Have a place for recording requests and answers.** The weakest ink is better than the strongest memory. We do not want to forget someone's requests or needs, but often we do. It is valuable to have a list or, even

better, a small notebook in which to record prayer requests. Then you have them right in front of you as you pray. It also becomes a testimony of the many prayers God has answered. When I get discouraged, I often get out one of my past prayer notebooks and look at all the answered prayers.

5. **Ask God to direct you to appropriate Scriptures.** Sometimes we are not sure what we should be praying into a person's life. When in doubt, Scripture is the best thing we can pray. Paul left some great examples of prayers he prayed for those under his care (Ephesians 1:17–19, 3:16–19; Philippians 1:9–11; Colossians 1:9–12; 1 Thessalonians 1:2–3). I have special verses God has directed me to pray regularly for my children, my wife, and my key leaders.
6. **Season your intercession with thanksgiving for each member.** It is easy to get frustrated with the people we are called to lead. They sometimes act like sheep, wandering off in all the wrong directions. The apostle Paul seemed to keep amazingly free from the frustrations of spiritual shepherding. I think one of the reasons for this was that he persistently thanked God for those sheep. Notice that Paul consistently begins his letters and prayers with words of gratitude to God for his people (Ephesians 1:16; Philippians 1:3–4; Colossians 1:3–4; 1 Thessalonians 1:2).
7. **Mix fasting with prayer for greater effectiveness.** Many prayer warriors have discovered a "secret" of prayer: fasting. Fasting is voluntary abstinence. It generally involves abstaining from food for a period of time in order to focus on God and give ourselves more wholly to prayer. Typically, fasting lasts for one complete 24-hour period—usually from sundown to sundown. The early church fasted two days every week, Wednesday and Friday. Pharisees fasted Tuesday and Thursday. Other biblical fasts ranged from 3 to 40 days. Both individual and corporate fasts are seen in the Scriptures.

I generally fast for about 20 hours before my small-group meets on Wednesday evenings. This means I eat dinner on Tuesday evening and then don't eat solid food until late afternoon on Wednesday. When I fast, the group seems to flow better, and I seem to do a more effective job as the leader.

8. **Pray through all possible elements of the group meeting before hand.** It is better to pray before trouble comes. Think of all the possible elements of your small-group meeting and bathe them in prayer. From the attendance to the worship, from the prayers to the discussion of the Word, cover each section with prayer. This will give you peace and confidence that God will be able to do all he wants to do in your gathering.
9. **Pray for your apprentice(s), and for the birth of future groups.** A key here is to remember that your group cannot multiply unless you find and develop apprentices to lead future groups. Jesus told his disciples to pray for the Lord of the harvest to raise up laborers (Matthew 9:38). Good apprentices are harvest laborers in the highest sense. They help you reap and maintain your harvest, and will one day multiply it as they lead their own groups.

When leaders ask me where to find apprentices, my answer is always the same: On your knees. God is the one who can send you an apprentice. God is the one who can help you find untapped potential in the people of your group. God is the one who can guide you in bringing out the best in them. You just need to ask him.

10. **Pray for God's grace to help you.** Don't hesitate to pray about your prayer life! Ask God to help you build it into your schedule and your daily priorities. With prayer, all the other things you do will be better. Without it, all the other things you do won't amount to much.

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SmallGroups.com, April, 2012

ARTICLE

Show Them How

Teach your group members how to listen well by modeling.

Diana Bennett | posted April 30, 2012



This article is excerpted from [Helping Group Members Become Great Listeners](#).

Unfortunately, most of us do not listen well. Instead of listening attentively, we wait for that split second of pause to jump in with our own stories and comments, our eyes wander the room, and our ears focus on other sounds. Attentive listening is a discipline that needs to be developed. It doesn't just happen.

Attentive listening comes as a response to prayer—praying for the Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our hearts while attentively listening to a person verbalize emotions, thoughts, experiences, and doubts. What is the Holy Spirit prompting you to hear? Where do you see God moving in this person's life? Where are you noticing spiritual growth and discernment that was not evident earlier? This is not the time to compare stories, give advice, or reprimand a person's actions. Listening is a time to appreciate and discern what is happening in another's life.

How Well Are You Modeling?

Developing listening skills should be part of every healthy small group. After all, if we cannot listen well to one another, how do we listen well to the voice of God? As small-group leaders, we need to model listening to our group members. How true are these statements of you?

I always have eye contact with the person who is talking.

I never shuffle papers or look around the room while another is talking.

I don't look at my watch when someone begins to share.

My posture is that of receiving—my arms are not crossed, I'm leaning slightly forward, and my body appears "open" to listen.

I don't add to or embellish what someone else has tried to share with what I think they mean, possibly adding my own examples.

If we as leaders can model attentive listening, our group will begin to respond. Attentive and prayerful listening involves inviting the Holy Spirit into the process; it is counter-cultural to our normative practices. It is contemplative, careful, sensitive, evocative listening. This kind of listening develops trust, freedom, and openness, and it touches souls at the deepest level. Then we will "love one another deeply, from the heart" ([1 Peter 1:22](#)).

Talk About Expectations

In beginning a new small group, or at times when you're revisiting your covenant, an emphasis on the importance of attentive listening is critical. Remind group members that everyone has a chance to speak while others give the gift of attentive listening. When people feel

they have been carefully and attentively heard, group bonding increases, friendship grows stronger, and prayer becomes increasingly powerful. This type of listening develops over time and can become a way of life. We hear God speak and see him work individually and corporately. Nothing is taken for granted. We "spur one another on." Some reminders for your group will be helpful:

Each group member is encouraged to participate; no one dominates.

One person speaks at a time; the rest listen and discern.

No one is called upon; discussion does not go "around the circle."

Everyone's contribution is important.

Advice and criticism are not acceptable.

There will be times when others can ask clarifying questions or speak encouragement into other group members.

Use Teachable Moments

As small-group leaders, we can help develop the discipline of attentive listening as we study. Whether you're studying the Bible or simply sharing life stories, your discussion will benefit from attentive listening. Pay special attention to application questions that introduce the opportunity for deeper listening. Truly listen to the answers given. Consider the following reminders:

Watch your body language. You communicate a lot without even speaking. Keep eye contact and lean slightly forward. Make sure your arms aren't crossed, giving the impression that you're closed off.

How do you respond when someone speaks more frequently than you wish? Prefacing a question with "let's hear from someone who has not shared" helps curtail the constant-comment person from dominating.

Listen "between the lines." Watch the speaker's body language. Ask clarifying questions and encourage through comments such as "this must be a difficult time for you" or "we celebrate what God is doing in your life." The goal of listening is to understand what the person is trying to say at the heart level.

If judging, criticizing, and giving advice surfaces from the group, immediately halt the conversation. For example, a leader can say, "Thanks for your interest in helping out, but we're giving advice more than listening at the moment." It takes boldness laced with gentleness! But judging, criticizing, and giving advice cannot continue if you want to listen well. If a group member is repeatedly engaging in this behavior, find a time to talk privately.

Leader, you don't have to comment on everything that has been said. Choose facial expressions that show appreciation and affirmation. Nod along to show you agree and understand. Allow occasional times of silence before questions or comments. Silence is needed to reflect on what has been said.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer writes this in his fabulous book *Life Together*:

Listening is one of the most precious gifts we can give to one another. Stop for a moment and recall your own feelings when you last felt truly listened to ... Listening says to the other person: "I care for you, I respect your uniqueness. How you feel and what you say matters to me. And in order to make this clear, I'm willing to set aside my own concerns, give you space to share yourself and offer you my focused attention. I want to try to understand the inexhaustible mystery of your inner world."

Everyone yearns to be listened to from a deep caring level. Amazing spiritual growth happens within a listening and discerning small group. Make your group members leave saying, "I feel so validated and encouraged because my friends really listened to me." The discipline will develop over time and flow into the life outside the group, family, culture, and marketplace. It begins with the leader and filters down into the life of the group.

—Diana Bennett is the Director of Small Group Ministries at Christ Chapel on Cape Cod. She also serves as the Consultant for Small Group Development and Training at www.LeadershipTransformations.org. Copyright 2012 by Christianity Today.

Discuss

1. How are you doing at modeling good listening to your group?
2. When it comes to listening, have you had a conversation with your group about expectations? If not, why not? If so, has it helped? Is it time for another conversation?

How easily do you take advantage of teachable moments? How can you prepare yourself to use teachable moments to show your group members how to be better listeners?

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ARTICLE

A Theology of Small-Group Worship

Spiritual formation for individuals, small groups, and the church.

Bonnie McMaken | posted October 10, 2008

Note: This article has been excerpted from the SmallGroups.com training tool called [Meaningful Worship in Small Groups](#).

For many churches, the majority of worship happens on Sunday morning. This is a significant way the body of Christ—as a community—focuses on God and his grace. However, worship that takes place during the week is vital to the life of the church, as well.

Small groups have the unique opportunity to worship in an intimate setting, using a range of formats, prayers, and musical styles to express their praise. This worship contributes to the spiritual formation not only individuals, but also the group as a whole. And by strengthening small groups, worship actually builds the church in its understanding of God's character and its evangelistic effectiveness.

Why Is Worship Vital to a Small Group?

When a small group worships together, they—as individuals and as a body—focus their attention first on God and his divine character made manifest in the person of Jesus Christ. Everything else the group does stems from this place of Christ-centeredness. In other words, worship is the fundamental center of a wheel that branches out into spokes. These spokes include evident Christian fruit, like service, compassion, and community.

This upward focus on Jesus also brings a sense of transparency to the group. Coming face-to-face with the holiness of Christ means we see ourselves as we truly are: broken, sinful, and in need of grace. This need is an individual burden *and* a corporate one. We share this brokenness not just with humanity, but also with all of creation (Romans 8:21–22). In the small-group context, therefore, our worship allows us to share our needs and become vulnerable with God and vulnerable with one another.

Vulnerability is essential for building community in a small group. Our pretenses are stripped down and we come as we are—with our flaws, the messy week we've had, and the angry words we said to our spouse earlier that day. Although these evidences of our brokenness can be easily concealed before our group, worship provides the space to open ourselves to God and to others. Group leaders should encourage the members in their group to see worship as an opportunity for personal spiritual growth *and* the development of group relationships and communion.

Be warned: when we are honest before God and one another, it is uncomfortable and humbling. We see not only our own brokenness, but also the tangible "humanness" of those in our group. Worshipping together allows the divine and the physical to intersect in powerful, and sometimes awkward, ways. If this is true of the larger church body, it is even more pronounced in a small group consisting of a few people.

I was once in a small group in which an older woman sang boisterously—and off-key. Instead of asking her to tone down, however, the group leader allowed this woman's enthusiasm to be a sign of true worship for our entire group. It was uncomfortable at times, but eventually my group members and I cherished this woman's praises and were able to enter deeper worship because of her adoration. These opportunities for living out the gospel in real Christian community give us a richer understanding of Christ's love and willingness to become flesh and live with us in our messy, broken, and awkward world (Philippians 2:1–11).

Why Is Small-Group Worship Important to the Church?

The church is a dynamic, living body of people founded on Christ. Worship does not happen just once a week in the Sunday morning service. In a healthy church, worship should be active and vibrant in the lives of its members throughout the week. Small groups provide the space and time for corporate worship outside the larger body, and through this more intimate worship and the building of community, the church as a whole is strengthened.

Small-group worship does two important things for the church body. First, it deepens the worship of the church. If small pockets of members are worshipping Christ with one another throughout the week, in the midst of daily life, the beauty and sacredness of worship on Sunday morning will be magnified and emboldened with vigor and new life.

Second, as the church worships with passion, others are drawn in and swept up in the worship of our Lord. Worship should be enjoyable for the church, but it should also be shared with those who do not yet know the grace of Jesus. In these two ways, small-group worship is not only significant, but actually vital for the worship and growth of the body of Christ.

How Can We Do This?

Jesus promises he is not only with us when we are gathered as his church, but when we come before him as pockets of believers (Matthew 18:19–20). In a small group, there is no need for anyone to say or do something that evokes the Lord's presence, for he has already promised he is there! The leader's job is to simply invite group members to open their hearts to Jesus and his leading.

This invitation can take many different forms:

Prayer is the clear biblical foundation of worship, but there are a variety of ways small groups can implement this discipline into their worship. The use of a prayer book (such as the Book of Common Prayer) is a good starting place for small groups because the prayers are all based in Scripture and structure is already given, so the preparation is minimal.

Lectio Divina is another kind of structured prayer. This ancient practice involves meditation—led by one person—around a short Scripture verse. The group is invited by the leader to use listening prayer to plumb the depths of this passage. *Lectio Divina* is a powerful tool used to connect with the Lord and his Word in fresh ways.

Small groups can also pray through music. The church has always used singing to express what mere words cannot. Some groups avoid this because they don't have anyone who can lead the music, but this logistic shouldn't hinder the group from singing together. Members can agree upon recorded worship songs or some hymns that are meaningful and easy to sing.

These are only a few examples of implementing worship into a small group. There are dozens of ways to introduce worship to a small group or to deepen a group's understanding of worship. We, as individuals and believing communities, are called to worship by God who has created and redeemed us. As we are spiritually formed through this practice, we are formed in our personal faith, in our small circles of fellowship, and as a part of the local and universal church.

—Bonnie McMaken; copyright © 2008 by the author and Christianity Today.

Discuss:

1. Have I ever been uncomfortable during a worship experience? Have I ever been humbled? What was the cause?
2. How does that knowledge that Christ is present in our small group affect my worship?
3. How can our small group incorporate the three types of prayer mentioned above?

ARTICLE

Helping Your Group Connect with God

Practical ideas for small-group worship

Steve Gladen | posted February 5, 2013

Note: This article has been excerpted from [Small Groups with Purpose](#) by Steve Gladen.

Setting the Scene

Encourage spiritual partners in your small groups. Ask your small-group leaders to instruct their members to find spiritual partners within the group. Train your leaders to encourage group members to share things they want to surrender and then help them develop a plan to do so. Set up your groups so this is done on a regular, ongoing basis. At Saddleback, we use the Spiritual Health Assessments and Spiritual Health Plans to do this. Talk about spiritual partners and the assessments from the pulpit, during small-group training, during small-group events, and in all your interactions with small-group leaders. Then encourage your small-group leaders to talk about them with their small groups.

Prepare your leaders by enriching their minds and hearts. Give your small-group leaders good books to read for spiritual development such as *The Pursuit of God*, by A. W. Tozer, and *Desiring God*, by John Piper.

Engage groups in the presence of God. Have a night of worship to bring groups together for corporate worship. There doesn't have to be a sermon, but provide plenty of time to reflect on God.

Share testimonies in weekend services of God moments. Ask group members to share their testimonies in larger services. There is nothing more powerful than a story from the heart. Be professional but be real and share what God has done through the group.

Basics of Worship in a Small Group

We have found it useful to think of group worship in terms of expressive worship and reflective worship. It does not have to involve music, but it needs to be more than just something to do. It needs to be an experience. Give your small-group leaders a list of suggestions to pass on to their groups that doesn't just tell them to worship but also gives them practical suggestions.

Expressive Worship

Prayer. Whether as a group or as individuals, make audible prayer a part of every small-group meeting. That doesn't mean forcing each member to pray out loud, but give every member the chance to do so.

Thanksgiving. Go around the group and ask members to say one sentence of thanks to God for something specific in their lives.

Music. This can be low-volume music played in the background during prayer time or an all-out worship fest right in your living room. The idea is to do something that works for your group.

In our small group, John is our unofficial worship leader. Not too long after he started coming to the group, I learned he loves music and plays the guitar. When I chatted with him about his passions, I learned he likes to lead worship. But when I asked him to lead worship for our group, he said, "No, I'm not qualified." This is where most people start, never believing they are ready. But through some encouragement and leading (okay, pushing), John agreed to give it a try. His first time out of the gate was a bit shaky, but over time he has led us in some awesome times of worship.

John grew by taking a risk, but his willingness to step out in faith also encouraged another guy in our group to step out and lead worship too. Now do the two of them think they are the worship champions for our group? No. But are they the worship champions of our group? Yes. Every role in the group has started out like that. In developing roles, just think crawl, walk, run. Everyone starts by crawling, then gradually he or she begins to walk, and before you know it, that person is off and running.

Encouraging John accomplished a couple of things: (1) Our group benefits from John's gifts because he is really good at what he does. (2) John's increased involvement in the group gives him a sense of ownership. He feels like he's contributing and making a difference with the gifts God has given him. He may not know the Bible well, and he may not really know how to share his faith yet, but he knows how to worship and love God.

Sharing struggles. Encourage group members to share their struggles with the entire group. As they do so, stop and pray for each other.

Sharing God stories. Tell each other how God is working in your life. Such stories can be a great way of not only adding depth to your relationship but also worshipping God for all he is doing in your lives.

One of the stories I share is about when Lisa and I were thinking about moving to Colorado. Soon after we were married, it became clear to us that our ministry in North Hollywood was coming to a close. Since my parents had always taught me to pray specifically, and we were going to be making a change in churches, I told Lisa that if we had to move, we should pray for a desirable geographical location. So we pulled out a map and said, "Lord, if we have a choice, we would like to pray for a ministry opportunity in San Diego, the Bay Area in Northern California, or because we both like the mountains, the Rocky Mountains." Not feeling the Rocky Mountains was specific enough since they run across six states, we narrowed it down to Denver.

Less than 30 days later I received a call from a church concerning a job opening. They told me what a great opportunity this new position was, that their church was poised for the next move of God, that they were looking for someone like me who wanted to do ministry, and so on. I honestly wasn't paying too much attention until they said they were located in Denver. My ears perked up and I asked them to repeat everything, because I was now listening with a different perspective. I agreed to explore the opportunity, and they agreed to send me an information package.

After I hung up with them, I quickly phoned Lisa and told her about the call. But we both quickly wondered if it was from God or just a coincidence. Later that week the information package arrived, and in it was a book the pastor, Charles Blair, had written, *The Man Who Could Do No Wrong*. In one section of the book, Blair writes about ignoring his wife's counsel on a certain situation. As a result, the church suffered a major difficulty. Well, I thought if it was good enough for him, it would be good enough for me too. So on Wednesday during lunch at Numero Uno Pizza in North Hollywood, I asked Lisa for her counsel. I asked her if there was something heavy on her heart about this potential move. If so, I wanted us to pray about it to see if this was God's leading. I fully expected her to say something about leaving her family, because they had lived for generations in the Los Angeles Basin and this move would be 1,000 miles away! Instead, her short answer was, "The snow." She was born and raised in Burbank, California, and was fearful about driving in the snow. So I said, "We'll pray about the snow," and we prayed God would calm her fears and make our path clear.

That evening in Lisa's small group, for some reason the leader changed the normal study and decided to explore a Scripture that deals with fear: "When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet" ([Proverbs 31:21](#)). Later that night Lisa shared with me what had happened. God or coincidence? Are you kidding me? Could God have made it any clearer?

God stories are just that—stories about when the supernatural God intersects with our lives. When Lisa had to tell her boss we were leaving, she was a bit nervous about bringing up the subject. As if to show God's sense of humor, when she approached her boss, he was wearing something that just had to be a sign from God—a Denver Broncos T-Shirt!

Reflective Worship

Silent prayers. Take time to be still and listen. Give group members time to silently commune with God.

Solitude moments. Have a small-group meeting during which members are asked to go away by themselves with their Bible for an hour. This can be done outside in a park setting or just in a home by allowing members to go to different parts of the house and then come back together and share with other members of the group. Or release members while they are still in a contemplative mood.

Meditation. Meditate on passages of Scripture. Perhaps provide group members with paper and pens to write their thoughts after meditation.

Fasting. Encourage group members to go on a two- or three-day group fast—whether from food or an activity. Be available to support each other during the week via e-mails and phone calls.

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The following article is located at: <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2013/dig-deep-into-gods-word.html>

SmallGroups.com, March, 2013

ARTICLE

Dig Deep into God's Word

The power of inductive Bible study for your group

Justin Marr | posted March 18, 2013



Note: This article is included in the leader training resource [Bible Study Methods for Groups](#).

"The Septuagint is paramount in understanding the Hellenized Jewish Diaspora," proclaimed the white-haired lecturer from behind a podium. I looked to my left and right and saw a sleepy glaze cover the members of my small group. I could almost see the unintelligible vocabulary of academia flying over their heads.

Our church had invited a biblical studies professor to come and give a lecture to our congregation. My small group was eager to attend and dig deeper into Scripture. We were hungry for something beyond surface level Bible reading, but unfortunately, we left with a lingering feeling of discouragement.

We are all intelligent people. We are educated and we take studying the Bible seriously. But many of the words coming out of the visiting professor's mouth were shrouded in mystery. He spoke of original Greek and Hebrew words like they were common knowledge. It made us feel like we were incapable of breaching the wall to deeper study. My small group had come and knocked, but despite this professor's best efforts, the door was not opening.

Biblical studies can be overwhelming. Words like exegesis and hermeneutics are tossed into the fray and it can feel like you need a seminary degree just to stay afloat. But luckily, you don't need a Ph.D. in biblical studies to glean meaning and application from Scripture. All you need is a Bible and the willingness to ask the right questions. The trick is to think inductively. If you pay attention to the details—the who, what, when, where, and most importantly, the why—then you have all you need to let the Holy Spirit bring the text to life.

Inductive Bible Study with Your Small Group

One of the best tools for studying Scripture is inductive Bible study. It is the process of interpreting and applying Scripture by focusing only on the details found directly in the text. This is an invaluable exercise for small groups. Since we all approach Scripture from a unique point of view, collaboration allows for more to be seen and shared.

It might be easier to look up a set of verses in a commentary, but discovering the details without these aids allows you to see God's Word through the lens of your own individual perspective.

Step 1: Determine Genre

The Bible is a complicated book. What other book was written by upwards of 40 God-inspired people over the span of more than 1,000 years? It is a true masterpiece. The variety in authorship and time, however, did not lend itself to consistency in genre. It is important to discover the literary genre when interpreting Scripture because it affects our understanding of the author's purposes. The intent of

the book of Acts (a historical recounting of events) is very different from the intent of 1 Corinthians (a letter to a specific group of people). It's important for your small group to know what they're dealing with. Several genres are represented in the Bible:

- Law (e.g., Leviticus)
- History (e.g., 1 and 2 Kings)
- Wisdom (e.g., Proverbs)
- Poetry (e.g., Song of Solomon)
- Prophetic (e.g., Isaiah)
- Apocalyptic (e.g., Revelation)
- Gospel Narrative (e.g., Luke)
- Epistle/Letter (e.g., Ephesians)

Philemon, the book I will use as an example, is an epistle or letter. We know that letters are written to specific people for a particular purpose. Now we just need to know that purpose.

Step 2: Get Familiar

In order to really understand a book or section of Scripture, your small group needs to get comfortable with it. The best way to do that is to read it multiple times. Have you ever noticed new aspects of a movie when you watch it the second, third, or fourth time? The same is true for reading scripture.

It's best if you can read the text you're studying 10 or more times. Ideally, each member of your small group can complete this task before you meet for the discussion. However, one or two read-throughs might be helpful. Keep these things in mind while reading:

- What stands out?
- Do you notice any reoccurring words or themes?
- Focus on a different character or aspect with every read.

For Philemon this isn't too difficult—it's only one page.

Step 3: Note the Nuances

English versions of Scripture were translated from the original languages (Hebrew, Greek, and Aramaic). If you ever took another language in high school, you'll know that there isn't always an easy English equivalent to every foreign word. Because of this, there can be slight word variation between the many English versions of the Bible.

Some translations seek to use words that are as equivalent as possible to the original (like the ESV, NASB, or LEB) and others seek to use words that carry the essence of the original intent (like the NIV or NLT). By reading a book or section of Scripture in various translations (many of which you can find at BibleGateway.com), you can pick up on the small differences and nuances between them. This will give your small group a more complete understanding of what the original language depicted. It will allow them to see some of the translational differences without having to know ancient Greek, Hebrew, or Aramaic.

- Are there any major differences between translations?
- Do any of the variations drastically change the meaning?
- Does one version clear up something that was confusing in another?

Example:

In verse 19 of Philemon, the difference between the New Living Translation (NLT) and the Lexham English Bible (LEB) is worth noting. The LEB states: "Lest I mention to you that you owe me even your very self besides." The NLT, on the other hand, states: "And I won't mention that you owe me your very soul!" The difference of "self" and "soul" can be profound.

This distinction helps us recognize a difference between a possibly literal translation of the Greek word and a more interpretive explanation of what that word may have been suggesting. "Soul" evokes the idea that Paul may have been the one that helped Philemon come to faith in Christ. "Self" could mean the same thing, but "soul" evokes it in a more obvious way. Differences like this are crucial in helping us see the bigger picture.

Step 4: Establish the Characters

1. Identify the author. Establishing authorship is a crucial piece of the puzzle. The more your small group knows about the writer, the more they can understand the author's intent.

The author is typically established in the first few verses of a book.

- Search the outlying verses if you're studying a section of Scripture in the middle of a book.

Discover how the author is communicating.

- Are they writing a letter? Are they recounting events?
- How does this affect what you know about them?

Search for anything distinctive about the author:

- Do they mention where they are?
- Do they talk about their past?
- Can you gather anything about their personality?

Example:

In Philemon, the writer identifies himself as Paul (Philemon 1). Timothy is also mentioned as a secondary author. We're able to determine that Paul is writing from prison (vv. 1, 9). Because he calls himself "a prisoner of Christ Jesus" instead of a prisoner of Rome or some other city-state, we can deduce that he is in prison for his work in spreading the Gospel.

Paul shows hints of great humility. He has some kind of authority, but chooses not to use it and instead identifies himself simply as an old man (vv. 8-9).

We can also gather that Paul plans to be out of prison by requesting the preparation of a guest room (v. 22).

2. Identify the audience. After your small group establishes authorship, the next step is audience. You want to know as much as possible about who the text is for. This will help you understand the author's purpose in writing. Furthermore, applying the text to everyday life is much easier when you know enough about the audience to put yourself in their shoes.

Search the text for any indication of who the audience is.

- Is it established near the beginning?
- Does the author refer to a single person or a group of people?

If the audience isn't specifically mentioned, what can you learn about the audience based on context?

- Is it a historical recounting?
- Is it a story to illustrate a point?
- What does this tell you about the audience?

Search for anything distinctive about the audience:

- Does it say where they are?
- Is their past mentioned?
- Can you gather anything about their personality?

Example:

Like most letters in the Bible, the audience for Philemon is also the name of the book. Philemon (a person) is the chief recipient of this letter, but it is also addressed to Apphia, Archippus, and to "the church that meets in your home."

We can learn quite a bit about Philemon from the text. Because the church met in his home, it is logical to assume he was fairly hospitable. The fondness of Paul's words in verses 4-7 show us that Paul and Philemon had an especially good relationship.

In verse 1, Paul calls Philemon a "fellow worker." This sentiment is echoed in verse 17 with "partner" and, therefore, Philemon was probably invested in the same work as Paul—the spreading of the gospel.

Lastly, we know that Philemon owes Paul his "very self" (v. 19). Because Paul's life and Philemon's life are both rooted in Christ, it is possible that this could mean Paul is the reason Philemon came to faith in Christ.

3. Identify other important characters. The Bible tells stories through people. This often goes further than just the author and audience. To get a clear picture of what's going on, your small group needs to identify any other important characters in the text.

Identify all the characters in the book or section of Scripture.

- How many are there? How many times are they mentioned?
- How important are they? Are they a chief part of the narrative?
- Who seems to stand out above other characters?

Determine how they're related to the author and audience.

Search for anything distinctive about the other characters:

- Does it say where they are?
- Is their past mentioned?
- Can you gather anything about their personality?

Example:

In the case of Philemon, the letter focuses heavily on a slave named Onesimus (v. 16). In verse 11, Paul notes that Onesimus used to be useless to Philemon, and in verse 15 we learn that Onesimus was separated from Philemon. These observations, coupled with the fact that he is being sent back, tell us that Onesimus is probably Philemon's runaway slave.

Paul writes that Onesimus became his son (v. 10). It doesn't make sense that Paul became his literal father. This intimate language more likely means Onesimus began following Christ because of Paul's teaching. More evidence for this is in verse 16, where Paul says he is a brother in the Lord instead of a slave.

It is important to note that Onesimus probably delivered this letter. Onesimus was the only person we know of who was sent back from where Paul was living (v. 12).

Step 5: Establish the Situation

Now that you've established the characters, you can finally get to the why questions. This is the meat of the study. Every sentence, story, and statement is there for a reason. Our ability to interpret the text and gather application hinges on this step. Discuss the possibilities with your small group.

Seek out the underlying thesis for the passage. What's the main point or focus?

- Is it meant to teach a concept?
- Is there a call to action?
- Is it meant to encourage or inspire?

Ask the why question as much as you can:

- Why did the author include this sentence, word, theme, etc.?
- Why is it structured the way it is?
- Why was this written?

Use this information to help you interpret the text.

- Test your theory against each verse. Does it hold up?

Example:

The first point of focus is verse 9, where Paul makes a strong appeal for Onesimus' sake. We learn that Onesimus has been a great help to Paul while in prison (vv. 11, 13). Paul even mentions that he "would have liked to keep him" there to help. But instead, Paul sees fit to return Onesimus to Philemon. But why?

It is possible that Paul subtly hints for Philemon to legally free Onesimus and send him back (vv. 14, 20-21). This could be the reason for the appeal.

The more important issue, however, seems to be reconciliation between two people that have a profound change in relationship. Paul does not send Onesimus back as a slave, but "better than a slave, as a dear brother" and even "as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord" (v. 16). Paul tells Philemon to "welcome him as you would welcome me."

Furthermore, Paul goes to great lengths to see this reconciliation through. Not only does he deprive himself of Onesimus's help, but he also says if Onesimus "has done you any wrong or owes you anything, [then] charge it to me" (v. 18). Reconciliation is so important that Paul is willing to see it happen at any cost.

All of this evidence leads me to a possible interpretation. Perhaps Paul's purpose is to teach Philemon and the other members of his Church about the transformative power of Christ. The point is to say that Christ transforms relationships—even if that relationship was previously governed by slavery and debt. To illustrate the power of the Gospel, Paul urges Philemon to view his runaway slave as a dear brother in Christ.

Step 6: Apply the Text

The last step is application. Now that your small group has discussed and interpreted the details, it will be an easy transition to talk about how it might apply to their lives. Prepare a few questions ahead of time to help guide your small group in the application process.

Choose open ended questions. Avoid anything that could be answered with "yes" or "no."

Make it personal. Ask people to share an experience to relate to the text.

Ask questions that challenge them to take action.

Example:

How do you think Philemon felt about Paul's appeal? How would you feel?

Imagine what it must have been like for Onesimus to carry this letter back and deliver it to Philemon. What do you think was going through his head?

In what way can you exhibit the same kind of humility that Paul showed when he made his appeal to Philemon?

Have you ever been wronged by a fellow Christ follower? How would you handle this?

Do any relationships in your life need reconciliation? What steps can you take this week toward seeing this happen?

—Justin Marr is a small-group leader and blogs at TheSocialHunger.com.

The following article is located at: <https://www.smallgroups.com/articles/2008/makings-of-great-outreach-focused-group.html>

SmallGroups.com, February, 2008

ARTICLE

The Makings of a Great Outreach-Focused Group

Helpful advice for starting and maintaining a small group of seekers

Cathy Mogus | posted February 8, 2008

Organizing or leading an outreach-focused group in a church setting is not for the weak. However, if you have been called and gifted by God for this task, you are in for the ride of your life! Anytime you attempt to bring others into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, you *will* experience the lows—and highs—of spiritual warfare.

For the past several years, my husband, Allen, and I have been involved in an evangelism outreach. We quickly discovered that the strength and outcome of the course depended largely on the success of the small groups. The makings of *great* groups were always a challenge. I would like to share with you a few things that worked for us:

Make prayer a priority.

Oswald J. Smith, the great Christian statesman known for his fervor for evangelism and prayer, wrote: "Intercessory prayer is the Christian's most effective weapon. Nothing can withstand its power. It will do things when all else has failed...God has placed this mighty weapon in our hands, and He expects us to use it. How disappointed He must be when we lay it aside and substitute natural means for supernatural work."¹

The success of the outreach-focused small group depends mainly – and I do mean mainly – on whether or not the leadership has made prayer a priority. Effective evangelism is the work of the Holy Spirit. Even the methods and means by which we carry out our programs should have His signature on them. "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5b –NIV), Jesus told his disciples.

Make contacts.

Getting the unbeliever through your church door will be your next major task. Put yourself in his or her shoes. What would get *you* into a Hindu temple or a Muslim mosque? I am betting it would have to be something pretty special!

It is our observation that personal contacts work best. You may attract a few through newspaper ads, billboards, etc., but nothing beats the one-on-one invitation.

You will have to convince your church members that their nonbeliever friends and relatives will benefit from—and enjoy—what you have to offer. So...

Make it great.

Allen and I have been involved in promoting and running Alpha Courses, an interdenominational evangelism tool, for some time now (www.alphacanada.org). It is definitely not the only successful evangelism curriculum out there, but we think it serves as a good example of effective outreach. It has definitely been fine-tuned to reach those who need Christ.

The Alpha Course, now in 155 countries, has helped to bring thousands of people into a personal relationship with God through Jesus Christ. The 10-session course includes ten dinners and a weekend getaway. The bait is "great food, laughter and learning in a fun and friendly atmosphere where no question about life and God is seen as too simple or too hostile (questions could include: Is there a God? Why am I here? Where did I come from? Where am I going?)"

Although the course involves a meal and a talk (usually a video presentation), it is the small groups that make all the difference. The leaders and their "helpers" are trained to facilitate effective discussions and to *listen*. Many of our attendees have told us how helpful it has been to have someone listen to *them*. Opening up to their group often serves as a bridge for them to accept Christ.

Make him/her feel at ease.

Several years ago, I attended a course at a Roman Catholic church. As the one-and-only evangelical Protestant, I felt more like a spy than a participant. I was secretly hoping my true identity would not be discovered.

I became nervous when small groups were formed—especially since my group facilitator looked like a priest! When he suggested we each tell our name and a bit about our spiritual background, I wanted to disappear. My heart raced and my neck blotted, but my turn came anyway. To my surprise—and relief—everyone kept smiling at me. In fact, no one, not even the "priest," seemed to care one way or another. Not only did they make me feel welcomed, they made me feel *equal*.

I often think of that incident when I welcome unbelievers into a small group setting. What can I do to make them feel at home? Do I come across as condescending?

Do they feel like my equal even if we disagree with one another? Most importantly, do they feel loved?

Make it fun.

Someone has said, "A sense of humor helps us overlook the unbecoming, understand the unconventional, tolerate the unpleasant, overcome the unexpected, and outlast the unbearable."

Always remember that it is a very scary—and daring—thing for the unconverted to place themselves in a Christian setting of any sort. It is like volunteering to be Daniel in the lions' den. As a leader, you have the privilege and responsibility of making it easier for them. Humor is an invaluable tool.

All good public speakers know that an appropriate joke or funny story eases their audience—and them—when they are first introduced to each other. I suggest you collect jokes (ones that are actually funny) to use generously with your outreach group. There is no law that says you cannot read them. Say something like, "I'm not good at telling jokes or remembering the punch lines, but I thought you might like this one..."

Humor is also quite helpful in getting a serious point across. It works especially well if you can laugh at yourself. For instance, I sometimes tell the story of how I accepted Christ as a small child. "It must have worked," I add. "My first grade teacher wrote 'Causes Arguments in Religion' across the bottom of my report card."

Make it theirs.

Your goal, as the leader of an outreach-focused group, is to make it become *their* group—not *yours*. This is why discussion is so important: *There are no winners in a discussion*. Once they have heard about the Christian faith via a talk or a video presentation, it is *their* turn to talk, and it is your turn to *listen*. Ask them such questions as, "What do you think about what you just heard?" or, "How do you feel about that?"

Do not argue with them. Simply get the ball rolling. (The "helpers" on the Alpha Course are trained to give the Christian viewpoint, but in a gentle and loving manner. It is of utmost important that the attendees feel understood even when they are way off base).

Make the follow-up a success.

Once the attendees of your small group have come to faith in Christ, you will want to help them grow spiritually. We have found that quite often they want to continue meeting. A Bible study for new believers is excellent. The Alpha Course uses Philippians as the base for its follow-up.

They may also be quite willing to start attending your church on a regular basis. This is where a buddy system is helpful. Try to pair them up with someone who can explain the theology and rituals of your particular church or denomination, maybe someone with whom they could share a pew.

I know this sounds like a lot of work—hard work—but the makings of a great outreach-focused group always starts in the heart of God. Why not ask Him if he has your name on one? Believe me, you will not regret the ride!

i. Oswald J. Smith, The Work God Blesses (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1934).

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SmallGroups.com, August, 2008

ARTICLE

Never Underestimate the Importance of a Good Party

The value of social gatherings in a small-groups ministry

Dave Earley | posted August 6, 2008

Everyone loves parties. From little kids excited about a birthday party to young ladies all atwitter at bridal showers, everyone loves a party! Whether it's wedding receptions and anniversaries or tailgate gatherings, getting together with good friends and tasty food is a can't-miss recipe for fun.

Never underestimate the importance of a good party or social activity as a way to build your group. In the small groups at my home church, we learned we could easily double our regular small-group attendance with unchurched friends if the group members invited them to a party or two first.

Theme nights such as "I Hate Winter," "Thanksgiving Dinner," "Halloween Bonfire," and "Fifties Night" have been very successful for us. To gather a crowd, the key is to provide good food and play a few corny games. Unchurched people always have a good time, and are usually willing to listen intently as a few of our group members share their stories of how they came to a personal relationship with Jesus. Often, decisions are made for Christ at such gatherings—all because we had a party.

God Loves a Good Party

In the Bible, God went out of his way to tell his people that he wanted them to have parties on earth. These parties certainly weren't drunken orgies. They were fun gatherings consisting of good food, good friends, and good times (Deut. 14:22–26). God loves parties so much that he commanded his children to take time off work and faithfully enjoy godly parties together. He even ordained that the entire Jewish religious calendar be based on ten national parties, or "feasts."

Never underestimate the importance of a good party.

Jesus did his first miracle at a wedding party (John 2:1–10). He was anointed for his burial at a dinner party (Luke 7:36–50). The Bible says that when a sinner repents, heaven throws a party (Luke 15: 5–7, 9–10, 22–24). The Pharisees even criticized Jesus because they thought he was too interested in parties (Luke 7:34). When Jesus spoke of the kingdom of heaven, he called it a banquet party (Luke 14:15–24).

Deepening Relationships

Many people have a relational void or hole in their hearts. One reason people come to small groups is to fill that social void in their lives. Don't fight it! Use it to build your group. Every few weeks, plan a social gathering as part of your group's meeting schedule, or on a different night of the week. Such gatherings will increase the "fun quotient" of your group. Parties will add to group excitement, ownership, interest, and involvement. Parties are also very effective evangelistic tools, as non-believers see firsthand that Christians can actually have fun.

Social gatherings provide group members with a new outlet to share even more of their lives together. During a well-planned social gathering, people often discuss things that never seem to come up in a group meeting where everyone in the room is listening to the person talk. They get to see each other as "real people." Going rafting or playing softball allows the group members to see sides of one another that they may rarely see in the group meeting.

Discipleship Opportunities

Some of Jesus' greatest moments with his disciples were not in formal settings, but in social gatherings. Jesus used every opportunity to disciple his group by telling stories and asking probing questions in order to get his disciples to think and process what he may have said in a sermon they heard days before.

You, too, can disciple your members the way Jesus did. Use conversations and dialog surrounding what you are learning as a group and as a church.

Retaining Visitors and New Members

Research shows that if new people at a church or group do not make seven friends within the first seven weeks of attendance, they will not stay. Small groups and social gatherings are the natural solution. Use social gatherings as an opportunity to help new people make friends with others in your group quickly. Organize some type of social gathering at least every seven weeks, and focus on getting new folks there as the main reason to hold the event.

There is practically no limit to what you can do for fun as a group. You can have a group picnic, go to a baseball game, have a married couples' date night, go camping, have a cookout, go bowling, play volleyball, go out to eat at a nice restaurant, play board games, and so much more. Just make sure you invite as many unchurched people and unconnected church members as possible.

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SmallGroups.com, June, 2005

ARTICLE

If You Invite Them, They Will Come

What do you have to lose?

Dave Earley | posted June 12, 2005

I help my family lead a group of high school students. In the last two years, we have seen almost two-dozen unchurched kids come to Christ. About half of them have become regular church goers, and many of those now bring their parents. We do several things to attract and win so many seekers, but the single biggest factor is inviting.

When it comes to inviting, we follow one simple principle: If you invite them, they will come. Occasionally I have heard leaders say that they do not invite people "because they might not come." When people tell me this, I always ask, "If you invite them, what is the worse thing that could happen?" They generally respond, "They might not come."

Then I reply, "If they are not coming anyway, how have you lost anything? After all, they just might come." It is exciting to know that if you invite them, they will come. Not all will come. Not all will come right away, but if you invite them, some will come.

According to Richard Price and Pat Springer, "Experienced group leaders ... realize that you usually have to personally invite 25 people for 15 to say they will attend. Of those 15, usually only eight to 10 will actually show up, and of those, only five to seven will be regular attenders after a month or so." ¹ This means you can grow a new group of ten to fourteen regular members in a year by inviting one new person each week! If a whole group catches the vision of inviting, a group can experience explosive growth.

If you will invite enough people, some will come. When I start a new group, I start by asking two to five times the number of people I expect to have at the first meeting.

Some ask, "Where do I find people to invite?" There are at least four good places to look for people to invite:

1. Family
2. Friends
3. Coworkers or fellow students.
4. Neighbors

The Earley's not-so-secret plan for meeting new people to invite:

I work on a church staff with thirty other Christians. My wife is a stay-at-home mom. We spend most of our free time doing things with our three boys. Therefore, we have found that we must be very intentional about building relationships with unchurched people or it will not happen. We have found that the easiest way to build relationships with the unchurched is by getting to know the parents of the children with whom our boys come in contact. Find an avenue to get into the world of the unchurched and build some eternal relationships.

KEYS TO EFFECTIVE INVITING:

1. Saturate the situation in prayer.

God knows the "what, when, where, and how" of an effective invitation. Prayer helps us to cooperate with what He is doing.

2. Keep them saying "Yes."

Once someone has said "No" to an invitation, it can be easier for them to say "No" to the next invitation, so it is valuable to get them to say, "Yes" and to keep them saying "Yes." If possible, build a bridge of "Yeses" until they are regular attenders of your group.

For example, some people invite a person to a group before the person is ready to say "Yes" to a group. However, the person may be ready to say "Yes" to allowing their children to attend a children's activity at the church. A progression of "Yeses" may look like this:

Yes to accepting cookies you made for their family

Yes to having you pick up their mail while they are on vacation

Yes to allowing you to pick up their kids for a function at your church

Yes to desert at your house

Yes to having them come over and watch the Superbowl at your house

Yes to letting you pray for their sick mother

Yes to attending your group

Obviously, different people have different progressions of "Yes." Pray about finding the thing they will say "Yes" to, and start from that point. Let me encourage you not to make the mistake of taking it personally when people you invite say "No." Too often, we get our feelings hurt and withdraw from the person we feel has rejected us. Instead, we need to keep caring for and loving them.

3. Perseverance.

Too often, we invite people once, and they say "No," so we do not invite them again. Too frequently, we invite them to come and they say "Yes," but do not show, so we do not invite them again. Sometimes, we invite them to come, and they come but do not come back, so we do not invite them again.

Many times we are guilty of giving up on a person too easily and quitting too quickly. Persistence makes a difference. I find that many people who do not come at the first invitation often come after the third or fourth, if I have continued to build a caring relationship.

I knew Todd for several years. He had not shown much interest in attending church. However, he had allowed his kids to attend our Vacation Bible School. Over the years, I had earned his trust and had planted the seed. I invited him to a Friend Day at church. He told me that he was busy jet skiing with his family on Sunday's, so I waited until the weather got too cold to jet ski and invited him again. This time, he said "Yes" he would come, but he never showed up. I kept working on building our friendship. Not long after that, he told me his wife wanted a separation. This time, he asked me about coming, and he has been consistent ever since. God has wonderfully changed his life. I am glad I did not give up.

4. Practicing the principle of "Six to Stick"

Realtors tell us that it takes about six solid contacts to fix their name in the minds of prospective house buyers. I have found it also takes about six contacts by a group leader to fix their group in the mind of a potential member. You want to help them think, "If or when I ever go to a group, I want to go to that group."

Some people make one attempt at getting people into their group, and when they do not come, they think their effort was a failure. Maybe it was not a failure; maybe it was a step in the right direction.

5. Praying for and capitalizing on opportunities.

I was at a baseball game watching my fourteen-year old son play shortstop. I had planned to invite someone to a Friend Day we were having at church that week, but I had not had any opportunities. I quietly asked God to give me one. There was a single mom whose son was pitching for my son's team. As I walked by her, I felt the prompting of God to invite her. The next thing I knew, I was telling her about our group and asked if she would like to come. She said yes. The next game I told her more about it, and the next week she came.

Afterwards, she said, "I am surprised to say it, but I have to admit that I absolutely loved it." They came back every week. A few weeks later her son was saved. Three months later she was saved and was not only a regular attender at our church, but also a member of my small group.

6. Team inviting.

Inviting is easiest when inviting is done in concert with a team of people, a posse of prayer, and a healthy group and church. You do not have to do it all by yourself. It is especially powerful when the person you are trying to reach already knows and likes someone else in your church or small group.

7. Capitalizing on the seasons of the soul.

People have seasons of the soul when they are more open to the Gospel. Most adults come to Christ, or come back to Christ, out of one of these seasons:

- Death of a loved one
- Move to a new neighborhood, city, job, or school
- Divorce
- Marriage
- Family problems
- Major illness
- Birth of a child.

The wise leader is sensitive to these seasons. Lovingly use them to increase ministry to the person you hope to invite ...because if you invite them they will come.

This article is adapted from chapter three of the book, Eight Habits of Effective Small Group Leaders, by Dave Earley, Houston TX: TouchUSA: 2001.

1. Price and Springer, *Rapha's Handbook for Group Leaders* (Houston, TX: Rapha Publishing, 1991), p. 132

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SmallGroups.com, December, 2002

ARTICLE

Small-Group Leadership Mentoring

What is shepherding, really?

Len Woods | posted December 12, 2002

It's recruiting time at our church. Because of growth, job transfers, and normal turnover, we're looking for a larger-than-usual crop of folks to step up and consider (or re-consider) serving in or training for small group leadership.

Our problem is that our current crop of leaders is stellar. One guy is a true Bible scholar, who once took a seminary course in "Rapid Hebrew Reading." (Need I say more?). Another is the prototypical "Dr. Feelgood"—warm, genuine, caring, and thoughtful (Does he have a clone? How *does* he keep up with so many people?). Others excel in other areas: Leading their groups in effective, fulfilling service; slowly and deliberately taking folks through basic discipleship; or stimulating great discussions.

The effect of such capable leadership has been that an insidious "mythology" of small group leadership has developed in our church. In essence, many qualified folks feel inadequate at even the thought of shepherding a few others in the faith.

And then, of course, there is *that* word...the "s" word—"Shepherding." It sounds so...so *awesome*...so *biblical*...so unattainable.

We're finding that a lot of our would-be leaders hear the "shepherd" word and immediately think, "Oh, yeah...The *LORD* is my shepherd..." or "*Jesus* is the Good Shepherd" or "Isn't 'shepherd' just a synonym for '*pastor*'?"

Thinking this way, they reason, "Well, I'm pretty confident I'm not 'pastor' material—and I *know* I'm not in the Lord Jesus' league when it comes to caring for sheep! So..."

"Thanks, but no thanks," is the common reply.

This situation has forced us to do two things: One, to confront the myths associated with small group leadership; and, two, to develop a mentoring framework that models the idea of being a shepherd.

To help them buy into a more realistic (and, we believe, more biblical) small group leader job description, we've come up with a helpful acronym to guide our small group leader mentoring process. It's S-H-E-P-H-E-R-D (imagine that!).

Very simply put, we say a small group leader is, in simplest terms, a *shepherd*, meaning he or she...

Seeks to know and please God, and do His will in every area of life.

This qualification stems from the biblical principle that all fruitful ministry flows from a vital relationship with Jesus Christ (John 15). A perfect walk is not the requirement; but a consistent walk is.

Has a heart for people and a desire to see lives changed.

Do you want to see people meet Christ and grow in their faith? Then you qualify, even if your spiritual gift is not "*pastoring*." Where is it written that small group leadership is open to only one kind of Christian, or personality type, or gift? If you care deeply about the spiritual life and health of others, then you have what it takes to be effective in helping build communities of faith where lives are changed.

Ensures that his/her group is guided by and rooted in God's Word.

God's Word is central to the goal of lifechange (2 Timothy 3:16,17). A leader may not be a trained theologian or an unusually gifted discussion leader, but he or she *will* see to it that the group is led (by some capable person) in the study and application of Biblical truth.

Prays faithfully for group members and the group process.

This is the trust factor. This is the recognition of the truth that unless God works, nothing eternally significant will happen (Ephesians 6:18-20). Our leaders are encouraged to set their watch alarms and pray. For example, one might set her alarm for three p.m. daily. When it goes off, she prays for three group members for three minutes. Later, she rejoices at how God has worked!

Helps group members discover and use their God-given abilities.

Small group leadership is **not** a one-man or one-woman show. Too many group leaders burn out because they're like the proverbial circus performer who's spinning plates with one hand, juggling balls with the other, and, all the while, riding a unicycle through a hoop of flames!

The key is getting *everyone* involved. When the body of Christ is working as it should in a small group setting (1 Corinthians 12), with every member using his or her gifts, guess what? Sometimes the shepherd is in the shadows, practically invisible!

Encourages his/her group to reach out (in ministry to others).

Because of a group's natural (and occasionally sinful) tendency to focus inward, a good small group shepherd will continually prod the group to think bigger, to look outward, and to act redemptively. Perhaps he or she will need to defer to someone in the group who has God-given abilities and passions in outreach?

Recognizes God-given limitations and does not allow what he/she cannot do interfere with what he/she can do.

Some leaders beat themselves playing the comparison game. "I wish I could teach like _____. "If only I could counsel like _____."

Hey, guess what? God made you *exactly* like you are, to best do his will. Use what you've been given. Be creative. Trust. Be willing to delegate to others who have gifts you don't possess. As Abraham Lincoln once quipped, "It's amazing how much can be accomplished, when no one cares who gets the credit."

Develops (with elder, staff, and coach help!) new shepherds.

A huge role of any small group leader is helping to develop the next generation of leaders (2 Timothy 2:2). The goal is to work yourself out of a job! (Not really—you'll be needed next year to do the same thing... and the year after that, and the year after that...until the Lord returns). Remember, this *won't* happen inadvertently. We must be intentional and proactive. If we don't plan to grow, we might as well prepare to die.

By passing on what you know and by giving your apprentice ample opportunities to spread his or her wings, it won't be long before you are pushing a new leader out of the nest. (NOTE: We switched metaphors there—from shepherds to birds—but you get the idea!)

In short, we mentor our potential and current small group leaders to be *shepherds*, nothing more. In the purest sense that just means normal folks who genuinely love God and want to see others love him too. The mentor's job is to contribute whatever he or she has been given, to get others to do the same, and to keep—with help from above and from the person being mentored—the whole crazy bunch between the ditches and headed toward the ultimate goal.

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SmallGroups.com, September, 2004

ARTICLE

The "Joys" of Multiplication

Multiplying small groups can be difficult, but the rewards are worth it.

by *Randy Frazee* | posted September 27, 2004

Many groups are resistant to the idea of multiplication. It's difficult to break up an existing group for the sake of reaching out to new people. Having babies—creating new communities—is painful, but the trade-off is better than remaining evangelistically barren. How do you keep a group focused on the gospel's command to be outwardly focused? Here are a few principles for fostering an environment of multiplication.

- 1. Develop apprentice leaders.** Every group should have someone being trained by the existing leader to prepare for leading a new group. A leader without an apprentice is inhibiting growth. A simple way to identify apprentice leaders is to ask the existing leader to take a night off while the group still meets. In his absence, who would lead the group? The identified "pinch hitters" become viable candidates for future leadership. Holding the expectation that every leader needs to be preparing future leaders should be part of your total solution.
- 2. Maintain an interdependent infrastructure of small and midsize groups.** Every small group should have a larger mid-size group as its parent or sponsor. When a small group launches a new group, often the two small groups can form a mid-size group and still see each other at mid-size group events. If I know I'll continue to see my friends that are starting a new group, their leaving does not seem as severe. Every small group needs a mid-sized group to relate to and every mid-size group should be made up of launched small groups. This interdependent infrastructure helps lessen the pains of launching new groups.
- 3. Meet together outside of small group meetings.** We've found that groups who complain most about launching are groups who meet infrequently. If a group is only meeting 2 to 4 times a month, then it probably hasn't had enough exposure time to go as deep as it desires. Groups that are meeting formally 2-4 times a month and then also meeting for service, socializing, worship, study, breakfast and other meetings often don't feel threatened by a group launching from their formal home group time.
- 4. Sustain an influx of new people into groups.** When a group continues to have new people directed to it, the group will reach a spot where it will have to launch a new group. When a group of 12 adults consistently meets and has few new people attending, it can easily become resistant to launch. When a group continues to have new people come and the ranks swell, the group usually comes to the conclusion on its own that it's time to start a new group. As new people come to your church, direct them to a home group in their area. Staff or trained volunteers can help introduce new people to groups. Just because a group seems full doesn't mean new people can't be introduced to it. These new people often lay the stages for future group launches.
- 5. Allow groups time before you launch a new group.** Most home groups have a 12 to 24 month "shelf-life" before major change takes place. Groups tend to launch new leaders or whole groups by this time, or they tend to calcify and may never launch new groups. This time frame allows a group to go through one to two seasonal cycles together before launching. Some groups launch sooner, but many need time to enjoy life together.
- 6. Make multiplication an institutional and leadership value for groups.** In all of your leadership training, church promotions, and support of home groups, emphasize the value of groups growing and launching. Also, emphasize this from the pulpit; let the church leadership express the value of groups launching groups. If the expectation is clear and repeated often, over time people will get the message that groups are expected to launch new groups. All leaders should be charged and encouraged with the vision of extending the joys of community to others beyond their existing group (Mt. 9:36-38).

7. **Make missionaries.** Instill a missionary mentality in your group. Encourage groups to "send missionaries" from their group to start new groups. Have people pray for new leadership couples, commission them like you would missionaries, and encourage people to ask God if He would like them to become missionaries in their own neighborhood. Groups that send missionaries out experience pride and ownership when they help out these new people.

Randy Frazee is founder of The Connecting Church and author of [Making Room for Life](#) and [The Connecting Church](#). The Connecting Church Association exists for the purpose of helping you build biblical community. Please send your ideas about joys of multiplying to info@theconnectingchurch.org. We would love to hear from you!

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SmallGroups.com, March, 2004

ARTICLE

You Can't Have Babies if You Don't Get Pregnant

Why mentoring is a prerequisite to multiplication.

Dave Earley | posted March 12, 2004

Jim led a group for several years and did a good job. It was a strong group that met the needs of the members. Yet, he never seemed to be able to find an apprentice to mentor. So the group did not multiply. Then Jim had a stroke. He was physically unable to lead his group anymore. Since there was no one mentored to take his place, his group soon died. Looking back, Jim did nearly everything right, except mentor an apprentice.

Rod led a group for several years and did a good job. It was a strong group that met the needs of the members. And Rod mentored an apprentice named Scott. When Rod moved on to plant new groups, Scott took over. The group continued to grow. Over the years, Scott mentored apprentices like Mike, Mark, Dave, Dale, and Jamal. Eventually they led their own groups. Many of their apprentices became leaders. Mike and Jamal went on to plant new churches. Rod and Scott made mentoring a priority and multiplied the group several times. Highly effective small group leaders make a habit of mentoring apprentices.

Mentoring Is:

1. Mentoring is cooperating with God in raising up an apprentice to become a highly effective small group leader.

This may sound overwhelming but raising up spiritual reproducers is the heart of God. All you have to do is cooperate with Him in the process.

2. Mentoring is following the example of Jesus and Paul.

A study of the gospels reveals that mentoring was the method of Jesus. The goal of the Christian life is to be like Jesus. In no way is a Christian more like Jesus than when they are making disciples and raising up leaders. Before Jesus told his disciples to make disciples, He did it Himself. Men were His method. Jesus spent his ministry life mentoring future leaders.

Mentoring was Paul's method too. Paul told the Corinthians to follow him as he followed Christ. One of the ways Paul followed Christ was mentoring leaders. When he was killed, the ministry did not stop. Timothy, Silas, Titus, and others carried on.

3. Mentoring is the means of multiplying yourself

How many times have we wished we could be at two places at one time? Mentoring is the only way a busy person can minister in more than one place at a time. For example, fifteen years ago I started one group. I could only be in that one group. Yet, I mentored the people in that group to become multiplying small group leaders. Many of those in that group have spent time the last few years raising up group leaders. Today there are nearly one hundred groups from that initial group. So now, in a sense, I can be at one hundred places at a time!

4. Mentoring is the way one ordinary person can reach thousands

You say, "I could never minister to a thousand people." But if you are an effective small group leader, you can mentor someone else to become a leader. And by mentoring one highly effective leader at a time, you can eventually minister to thousands through the ministry of the leaders you have trained. Effective mentors understand that they will never have multiplied results until they multiply themselves into other leaders.

5. Mentoring is letting go of ministry in order to let others minister.

People fail to see their ministries grow because they hang on to them too tightly. They fall in love with doing ministry. They enjoy meeting people's needs and seeing them grow. Sometimes they even get their self-esteem from being needed by the members of their group.

The problem with doing the ministry yourself is that no other 'ministers' are developed. The ministry stops with you. Effective mentoring involves letting go of ministry in order to let others minister. It lets others get in on the fun of seeing God use them to change people's lives. Effective mentors learn to enjoy the ministry success of others as much or more than their own ministry success.

6. Mentoring is saying, "No" to the urgent in order to say, "Yes" to the potential of the important.

Satan does everything he can to keep us from Christ. Once we are in Christ he does everything he can to keep us from ministering. Once we are ministering, he does all he can to keep us from mentoring. This is because he sees the awesome potential mentoring has to expand the kingdom of God. One of his favorite ways to keep us from mentoring is to get us so caught up with the tyranny of the urgent that we miss the potential of the important. We get so caught up in doing ministry—the urgent, we fail to mentor leaders—the important. Effective mentors make the choice to make it a priority even in the midst of everything else they are doing.

7. Mentoring is the most lasting part of the ministry of small group leadership.

I have led groups for over 20 years. The thing I look back on is not the groups I have led but the leaders I have developed, especially those who are effectively mentoring others. I count church leaders, pastors, and fulltime missionary church planters among those I have had the privilege of mentoring. Their ministry has continued long after I have moved on to new areas of ministry.

Four Steps For Developing New Leaders

1. Model it.

Have them watch as you do the ministry, just as Jesus did with His disciples ([Matt. 9:32-38](#)). Let them see a highly effective small group leader in action. When Paul and Barnabas were sent out to minister, Barnabas was the leader. Barnabas was doing the ministry and Paul was observing. Note how they are listed as "Barnabas and Paul" ([Acts 13:1-5](#)).

2. Mentor it.

Have them do it as you watch, assist, correct, and encourage, as Jesus did with His disciples ([Matt. 10:1](#)). Not long into their journey, Barnabas moved over to give Paul the opportunity to lead. Note that they now were listed as "Paul and Barnabas" ([Acts 13:6](#)).

3. Motivate it.

Have them do it as you encourage from a distance, as Jesus did when he sent them out two by two without Him ([Matt. 10:5](#)). Similarly, when Paul and Barnabas prepared for another missionary journey, Paul was ready to go on his own. ([Acts 15:36-41](#)).

4. Multiply it.

The original disciples multiplied out to a total of 70 ([Luke 10:1](#)), then perhaps 500 ([1 Corinthians 15:6](#)). After Jesus ascended to heaven, the number of disciples began to multiply to 3,000 ([Acts 2:41](#)), then 5,000 men ([Acts 4:4](#)), then so many that the Bible just says the number was multiplied ([Acts 6:7](#)).

In like fashion, Paul was soon ministering without the help of Barnabas and beginning to take others through the process like Silas ([Acts 15:39-41](#)), and Timothy ([Acts 16:1-3](#)). By [Acts 17:14](#), Paul left Timothy and Silas to minister in Berea on their own.

Mentoring Suggestions:

1. 1. Never do ministry alone.
2. 2. Take full advantage of all the training opportunities your church offers.
3. 3. Be constantly on the look out for new leaders.
4. 4. Talk of leadership as a privilege, not a burden.
5. 5. Don't put yourself on a pedestal or good people will shy away from leadership.
6. 6. Give responsibilities before you ask them to consider being leaders.
7. 7. Always consult with those above you before you give any titles.
8. 8. Realize that failing to mentor will always mean failing to multiply.
9. 9. Do not release leaders until they have a good chance of succeeding.
10. 10. As you move through the group cycle have your ministry role decrease and your apprentice's role increase.
11. 11. Give lavish affirmation and encouragement to them each step along the way.

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SmallGroups.com, June, 2010

ARTICLE

How to Find Your Next Apprentice

It doesn't have to be a difficult experience if you remember Who is in charge.

Sam O'Neal | posted June 15, 2010

This article is excerpted from our resource [Finding, Recruiting, and Training an Apprentice](#).

For some small-group leaders, finding an apprentice is about as difficult as walking around the block. They automatically think of that individual or couple in their group who has been blessing the socks off the rest of the group members—encouraging people, praying diligently for the group, volunteering to lead discussions, and making the best apple pie north of the *Rio Grande*. They are easy to tab as future leaders because they stand out so clearly within the group.

But if that doesn't sound like your situation, don't worry. Small groups that have an obvious choice for an apprentice leader are the exception, not the rule. It's much more common for a group to contain a leader who does almost all of the work, and then a collection of group members who always receive and rarely give.

In those cases, we often don't know where to begin when it comes selecting someone as a potential apprentice leader. And that's okay. In fact, it's an opportunity to help one or more of your members experience significant spiritual growth—and an opportunity for you to grow, as well.

The following steps will help you navigate through the process.

Pray, Pray, Pray

The first thing you need to remember when searching for a small-group apprentice is that you are not qualified for the job. You don't have sufficient wisdom to discern the spiritual lives and maturity of your group members and figure out which ones are ready to step toward leadership.

That job belongs to the Holy Spirit. He knows what your group needs, what you need, and what your next apprentice needs. And the way to hand over the recruiting responsibility to the Spirit is prayer. "Pray to the Lord of the Harvest _____," Jesus said, and his words remain sharp and active today when it comes to identifying and recruiting spiritual leaders.

So, if you want to move beyond your own wisdom and smarts when it comes to finding a person to join you in the spiritual leadership of your group, pray for your small-group members every day. Pray that God would be working in their lives, and pray that he would be sanctifying them through the Holy Spirit. And as you pray for the growth and development of your group members, ask God to raise up workers for the harvest in your community. And ask for wisdom to see who those new workers may be.

Use the Eye Test

As you interact with the Holy Spirit in prayer and request eyes to see the people that are ready for a new step, you also need to be watching your group members. Specifically, watch their eyes and their faces as they participate in group meetings, and as you interact

with them in the "real world."

Which person's eyes really light up when it's time to dig into God's Word? Who gets excited when the discussion goes deeper? Who displays empathy and a kind heart when other group members open their hearts or confess their sins? These are the people that may be ready to join you in leadership. These are the people that you need to especially lift up to the Holy Spirit in prayer.

In the same way, if you have a person or two in mind that you think the Spirit might be calling into leadership, watch their faces and their behavior within the group. If they pass the "eye test," it may serve as a confirmation of the Spirit's leading. If they seem bored or disinterested during important elements of your group's time together, you may be barking up the wrong tree.

Recruiting Questions

In addition to the "eye test," there are some questions you can pay attention to as you pray, and as you observe the members of your small group.

Who is faithful?

Who understands your vision (and the vision of the small group ministry)?

Who is eager to learn?

What person/couples seem to be the natural leaders of the group/team?

Do they have the ability to train others?

Who would be good candidates to be trained to minister along side you?

Again, as you think through these questions, be sensitive to the work and leading of the Holy Spirit—especially if that leading is taking you in a direction you don't want to go, or a direction you hadn't thought of before.

Don't Impose Your Own Boundaries

One final piece of advice as you go through the process of identifying a small-group apprentice: don't limit your opportunities. Be open to new directions that you didn't think of—and even new people you don't know very well.

For example, it's possible that your next apprentice will be a person that is not currently part of your small group. This is not an ideal situation, normally, but if you keep coming across a person that shares your passions and is being called by God to take a new step in leadership, there may be something going on. Don't resist it out of hand.

In addition, your church leaders may have identified people who are on fire for God and need to be mentored for leadership in a small-group setting. It may be that your group is just what these future leaders need.

—Sam O'Neal is managing editor of www.SmallGroups.com; copyright 2010 by the author and Christianity Today International.

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ARTICLE

Three Ways to Birth a New Small Group

Multiplication, launching, and planting are all methods of starting new groups.

Dave Earley | posted March 12, 2004

While there are several ineffective ways to birth new groups, there is no one right way to birth a group. Any form of these three basic methods can be very effective. As can a combination of them.

1. Multiply: Two groups of equal size multiply from parent group.

The vision of multiplication is shared. A new leader and/or leadership team develops. Relationships are developed. Group members are given the option of staying with the original leaders or being a part of the new group. The goal is to have a nearly equal amount of folks committed to both groups.

2. Launch: Core group from parent group launches new group.

As in option one, the vision of multiplication is shared. A new leadership team develops. Group members are given the option of staying with the original leaders or being a part of the new group. However, having equal halves is not necessarily the goal. The new leaders understand that the new group will be launched without many folks from the parent group.

3. Plant: One person from parent group plants a new group while others remain as a part of the parent group

The planter can be either the original leader or a new leader.

Multiplying Suggestions:

1. Talk about multiplying early and often.

Start from the very first week. Describe the fact that one of the purposes of the group is to raise-up leaders who will be sent out to lead new groups. At least monthly, pray in the group about the new groups to be birthed from this group. Remember people are down on what they are not up on. Keep the group informed of the plans and progress each step along the way.

2. Talk about multiplying in positive terms.

Do not speak of "breaking up" the group, "splitting" the group, or "dividing" the group. Instead talk about "birthing" new groups, "launching" new groups, "multiplying" groups, and "raising-up" new groups and leaders.

3. Talk about multiplying in terms of the big picture.

In our metropolitan area there are over 850,000 unchurched people. Over 200,000 people live within convenient driving distance of our weekend worship services. Every new group that is born lowers the number of unchurched people. When we talk about birthing new groups, we talk about reaching more of the 850,000 people who are unchurched.

I find that when we begin to speak of multiplying people often resist. Then we ask how many of them were not in church or our group a year ago. This is usually over 90 percent. Then we ask, "What if the people who were in our group a year ago had been too selfish to give up their place in this group? Where would you be now?"

4. Pray about the best method and the best timing for multiplying.

It is possible to make the right decision at the wrong time. Maybe the group is ready to multiply, but the new leader(s) are not. Or maybe the new leader(s) are ready, but the group is not. Or maybe it is a poor season to launch. For us, summer is usually not a good season to launch. Pray about finding the best timing for the multiplication.

5. Set a date for multiplying.

Setting a date for multiplying is essential in achieving the dream of multiplying your group. According to Joel Comiskey's survey of 700 multiplying cell leaders,

"Cell leaders who know their goal—when their groups will give birth—consistently multiply their groups more often than leaders who don't know. In fact, if a cell leader fails to set goals the cell members can clearly remember, he has about a 50-50 chance of multiplying his cell. But if the leader set goals, the chance of multiplying increases to three of four." 2

6. Celebrate the new birth.

When the small group is ready to give birth have a party and invite friends. Ask the small groups pastor to preside over a special time of prayer, sending out the new group(s) and leader(s). It is a great opportunity to recast the vision for multiplying. Some churches may make this a part of their worship celebrations to make a visual statement of their priorities and vision.

Notes: 1. Joel Comiskey, Cell Group Explosion (Houston, TX, Touch Publications), p. 46.

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