



Working with Small Groups

Workshop for Inspire Conference 2015



Disclaimers

- I do not know it all – this will hopefully be a shared learning experience.
- Much of what I am presenting comes from materials such as Transformational Groups (Ed Stetzer & Eric Geiger), and courses and conferences I've been on as well as adapted from when Theo Groeneveld led this particular workshop in the past.

What?

- A gathering of believers (often in homes).
Sharing, praying, learning together.
- "A micro-community of Jesus followers doing the Christian life deeply together."
Rick Howerton

"Jesus went up on a mountainside and called to him those he wanted, and they came to him. He appointed twelve that they might be with him..." Mark 3:13-14

"They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people."
Acts 2:46b-47

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matt 28:18-20

"In a world that is pushing against community, the church must push for authentic community. The world pushes us to isolation and then offers superficial interaction as a false community. Part of what the church of God (as the people of God) must do is show a better way. It's the Biblical way of community." (Transformational Groups, Ed Stetzer)

Discussion Questions:

1. What small group experience have you had?
2. Can a Board meeting / an Association / a gardening group be a small group?
3. If you could come up with a definition for a small group in one sentence, what would it be?
4. What would be the key elements that would make a gathering of people a small group and not just a meeting?
5. Why do you believe small groups matter?



Why?

- Jesus did it.
- The Early Church did it.
- Research has shown that small groups are the most effective tool in disciple making.
 - Research done (unfortunately only in the States) shows that people engaged in small groups read the Bible and pray more regularly, confess sins more frequently, share the gospel more freely, give more generously and serve more often than those not in a group.
- Practically it is an opportunity for members to do community:
 1. To learn about God
 2. To learn to love
 3. To study Scripture
 4. To pray.
 5. To become more human
 6. To encourage one another: “As iron sharpens iron, one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17
 7. To experience God's working in each other's lives. “Jesus with skin on.”
 8. To find a non-threatening entry point into the church.

1. Connectible: Small groups connect people in relationships. According to William Hendricks in Exit Interviews, one common reason given by people who leave churches is a failure to connect in relationship. Small groups provide a comfortable environment for newcomers to connect.

2. Reproducible: In human growth, multiplication allows the cell to become multiple cells, which allows change and growth to occur. Similarly, for growth to occur in the church, people groups must continuously grow and multiply. Small groups are more easily multiplied than large groups.

3. Assimilative: Just as small groups connect newcomers to the church through relationships, small groups assimilate members to ministry through service. As people in small groups grow in relationship together, they will readily serve alongside others and integrate into ministry opportunities.

4. Transformative: Small groups allow individuals to experience faster and deeper personal transformation through authentic community. For non-Christian seekers, small groups provide a safe setting to ask questions in a community of people who also wrestle and struggle. Thus, when they do come to faith in Christ, they are more likely to experience authentic life-change having been in and remaining in community.

5. Transferable: Small groups can be excellent ways to start churches. As an essential element of the transformational church, church planting generally necessitates a core group of people who are sent out to reach a new area.

Five Characteristics of Transformative Small Groups Ed Stetzer

How

- What is the purpose behind the group?
 - Formative
 - Teaching, Equipping, Scripture Focused, 'Bible Study'
 - Connective
 - Relationship building, sharing lives, 'Life Groups'
 - Missional
 - Outreach, New Church plant etc.

- Material and leadership should be chosen based on your key purpose.



Discussion Questions

1. In the groups you have been involved in – what do you feel the primary purpose behind the group was?
2. How did the material you used and the leader you had help or hinder this purpose?
3. How do we ensure the other two purposes don't get left out?
4. What has been the most successful group you have been a part of and what made it work?

What are the important elements within a Small Group?

Some Key Principles

1. Focus on Jesus
2. Be regular
3. Participate
4. Love – don't like!
5. Respect privacy – squash gossip.
6. Grow up
7. Major on the fruit of the Spirit



1. Mission Orientation

First, every small group should be mission oriented and focused on becoming part of and following God in his mission for the world. When someone becomes a believer he takes on the responsibility of being globally minded and this mindset contributes to his spiritual growth and maturity.

2. Word-Driven Mentality

Second, small groups need to be firmly rooted in the Scriptures, which are a source of life and growth. An element of sharing is welcoming and being encouraged in time together, but too much sharing can make the group seem like a support group. The needs people share in the group need to always be hedged-in and examined through the lens of Scripture.

3. Multiplication Mindset

A third aspect of transformational discipleship groups is a multiplication mindset. The whole purpose of a group is to eventually reproduce into another group that is making and growing disciples of Christ. This element of small groups helps them stay open to change and inviting to new people.

In order for this element to function properly and most effectively, church leaders need to relinquish ministry and leadership into the hands of believers in their church and not cling tightly to power. While groups can multiply while under the leadership of an elite few in the church, the possibilities of growth is minuscule compared to what occurs when the laity are leading their small groups.

4. Stranger Welcoming

A fourth element of small groups is that they are welcoming of strangers. Small groups must always be aware of new people in the church and new people in their groups.

Intentionality involves creating a welcoming and relational environment for new people. Without this the group becomes inward-focused and loses sight of the mission to make more disciples.

5. Kingdom-Focused

A fifth and final component of transformational groups is a kingdom-focused mindset. Groups need to stay focused on what God wants to accomplish in their time together, not how they can be the most exciting small group in the church. Groups cannot exist for the sole purpose of emotional support for its members, but must find their place in God's greater plan of advancing his kingdom.

[5 Essential Elements of a Transformational Small Group Environment](#) Ed Stetzer



Who are our leaders?

- Look for those who have hospitality and followers
- Look for those who are teachable and available
- Sometimes hosts and leaders are not the same
- People who can facilitate and create safe space.
(Lay preachers can be terrible small group leaders!)
- Leading Skills:
 - Open to sharing and affirming
 - Facilitating
 - Timekeeping
 - Balance in programme
 - Build trust relationships



The job of the small group co-ordinator, minister, CDE etc: To meet with your leaders regularly!

- Encourage, Appreciate and Inspire your leaders
- Synchronise with each other and the vision of the church
- Get advice on tricky situations
- Celebrate victories and share sorrows
- Share resources and ideas
- Identify new people to invite to groups
- Plot and scheme the starting of new groups together.

Discussion Questions:

1. If you think of folk who have failed as Small Group Leaders, what were the reasons for their failure?
2. What are the key needs for your small group leaders?
3. Do your groups take breaks over school holidays etc.? Why / Why not?
4. Do your groups synchronise the teaching program (eg. Discuss Sunday's sermon or all use the same book)? Why?

Common Struggles

What are some of the struggles you have faced in running / organising / attending small groups?

Gossip

Lack of leadership or direction

Loss of balance

Closed to newcomers or change

Logistics (distance, timing, children, safety etc...)



An introduction to Polarity Management.

(From “Walking the Small Group Tightrope” by Donahue and Robinson)

Why is it that some groups that shouldn't gel and work do and others that should be perfect crash and burn? They discovered a book called *Polarity Management* by Barry Johnson. It gave them a very helpful tool for analysis of success and failures.

The gist of Polarity Management is that there are many tasks in life that require creative tensions or tightropes between opposite poles that have to be walked and managed. e.g.

- Parents need to give their children protection and freedom
- Discipleship vs evangelism and maintenance and mission.

These are areas where we have what the author calls **unsolvable problems**. Parents cannot only set their children free, they have to protect them which may mean curfews and chores. These opposites have to be managed. If the tension is too slack the rope cannot be walked on. Too tight and the rope snaps.

Leading small groups is no paint-by-numbers. There are basic skills to master.

- Give people a sense of **belonging**
- Help them wrestle with **Scripture**
- Lead a good **discussion**
- Create a **loving** environment
- Listen to people's **needs**.

But these basic skills are not sufficient because the challenges that sometimes crop up in a group have to do with equilibrium that has been lost. A small group leader needs to face six challenges (or unsolvable problems) that have their own creative tension in them:

<i>Challenge to Meet</i>	<i>Tightrope</i>	<i>Purpose to achieve</i>
Learning	Truth-Life	Spiritual Transformation
Development	Care-Discipleship	Intentional Shepherding
Relational	Friendship-Accountability	Authentic Relationships
Reconciliation	Kindness-Confrontation	Healthy Conflict
Impact	Task-People	Serving Together
Connection	Openness-Intimacy	Inclusive Community

Two final observations:

- The ends of the continuums in all six challenges are good things. Truth is good, life is good. Managing these tensions is not playing something bad off against something good. That is why these tightropes are so tough!
- We never solve these polarities (that would mean we do one good thing, but never do the other!) We always have this balancing acts!

Resources

Finding good materials for your groups to use is difficult.

Material is often expensive or theologically unsuitable and there's a lot of material on the internet, but much of that is dubious.

What have you used and found helpful?

- www.upcsa-mad.org.za
- Working through the sermon from Sunday
- Creating your own resources
- Working through a book of the Bible using the SOAP methodology



INTRODUCING FELLOWSHIP & GROUPS

Key Texts: Hebrews 10:19-25 and 1 John 1:5-7 & 2:9-11

Fellowship is:

- 1: The horizontal beam of the cross
- 2: Vital part of our faith
- 3: Witness to the world,
- 4: A place where we may help and be helped

What is Christian fellowship? There are many answers to this question, some may be long and complicated, others short and simple. In Hebrews we are encouraged "not to give up the habit of meeting together".

Simply put then, fellowship is the gathering together of believers where the love of God is shared and experienced.

Although fellowship is not always the purpose for the gathering of a group of believers, it should always be the result! It could be that a group exists for Bible Study, or for prayer, or to do something practical like the musicians, the session, the W.F. or the board of management. There is always a danger that when we do get together to do something practical, we end up being task-centered instead of people-centered. But Christ came for people, not causes...

Fellowship is not limited to individual groups but to our Sunday services as well. The standard comment about the early church was: "See how they love each other!" I wonder if this is true of our congregation? Or are visitors saying "What an unloving Church!" or "I can't seem to get into any of the cliques." or "I just can't get to know anyone!"

Fellowship is not just the minister's job, nor is it just the task of the elders, but the vital work of every member!

How can you help in fellowship?

- Ⓞ Take a risk and stretch yourself!
- Ⓞ Introduce yourself to strangers and get to know them.
- Ⓞ Take the time to phone someone on their birthday.
- Ⓞ Invite people around for supper, or tea.
- Ⓞ Get involved in a group which interests you or where you can serve.

Remember that you could either be another ice-cube making the church a cold place or take the risk and be a candle shining into the darkness of loneliness and isolation

Here are some passages that talk about fellowship. Look 'em up and see!
Acts 2:42-47; Joh.13:34-35, Joh.15:12-17, Prov.27:17, Rom.1:12, 12:5,
1Cor.12, Gal.3:28, Eph.4:3&11-16, Mat.18:19, Ecc.4:10, 1Pet.3:8, Joh.17:23B.

LEADING BIBLE STUDIES AND FELLOWSHIP GROUPS

(Leader's Training Handout)

Principles

- Purpose: Discipleship. You are Christ's ambassador.
- The Human Factor: Every group is different.
- Pitching: Where is your group at? Scratch where it itches.
- Caring: A unique privilege.
- Reaching out: Becoming the contact point.

How to lead a Bible Study:

<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PREP: <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Pray2. Find passage3. Understand the background (Context)4. Colour/mark/write!!!!5. Find paragraphs6. Watch for clue/key words7. Find the main point in each paragraph8. Summarise9. Personalise before you Prophesy10. Don't Intellectualise - Internalise11. Read from the Passage not into the Passage12. Levels of Question<ul style="list-style-type: none">- ice-breaking and content- meaning- application	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> LEADING: <ol style="list-style-type: none">13. Pray14. Geography of Group15. Listen16. Shut the talkers up17. Get the quiet people talking18. Use your levels of question wisely19. Handle distractions/herrings20. It really helps if people can see the passage they are studying21. Asking people to <i>summarise</i> is a very powerful tool!22. Be honest - if you don't know then you don't know
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Ideas and Pitfalls for Fellowship Groups

<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Ideas</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→Lunch time get together→Short term, low key Theme Bible Study→Weekly discussions on a chapter from a book→Start with tea→Prayer requests (personal)	<p><input checked="" type="checkbox"/> <i>Pitfalls</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">→Carry on too long→Too spiritual (threatening)→Lack of relevance→One person dominates!→Lack of trust→Too Therapeutic (Shared ignorance)→Environment too stiff
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